

THE MISREPRESENTED ROAD TO MADAME PRESIDENT:
MEDIA COVERAGE OF FEMALE CANDIDATES FOR NATIONAL OFFICE

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Abstract

While women represent over fifty percent of the U.S. population, it is blatantly clear that they are not as equally represented in leadership positions in the government and in private institutions. Despite their representation throughout the nation, women only make up twenty percent of the House and Senate. That is far from a representative number and something that really hurts our society as a whole. While these inequalities exist, they are perpetuated by the world in which we live, where the media plays a heavy role in molding peoples' opinions, both consciously and subconsciously. The way in which the media presents news about women is not always representative of the women themselves and influences public opinion a great deal, which can also affect women's ability to rise to the top, thereby breaking the ultimate glass ceilings.

This research looks at a number of cases in which female politicians ran for and/or were elected to political positions at the national level (President, Vice President, and Congress) and seeks to look at the progress, or lack thereof, in media's portrayal of female candidates running for office. The overarching goal of the research is to simply show examples of biased and unbiased coverage and address the negative or positive ways in which that coverage influences the candidate.

Ultimately, the research finds that female candidates running for the most highly revered leadership positions, such as President and Vice President, and those in positions of power who represent a step in history, such as Nancy Pelosi as the first female Speaker of the House, face increased biased media coverage in comparison to females running for House and Senate seats. By seeing this coverage throughout a body of research, it helps

to shed light on the many ways in which media and society need to improve in regards to our discussions of women, whether they are political candidates or otherwise.

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Preface

As a young, millennial woman who considers herself to be a feminist and is fascinated by the ways in which media and social media are changing the ways we conduct our lives, I found myself wanting to further study the intersection of my many interests: politics, women's issues, and communication. That intersection is what led me to this work. Throughout all my studies and avid reading through the years, I had wondered how the glass ceiling, politically and otherwise, was influenced by the way in which we talk about women and how our society, often subconsciously, views women and their roles in the home and in the workplace.

When entering graduate school at Johns Hopkins University, I knew this was the topic I wanted to tackle because it peaks my interest day in and day out and I am often vocal on this topic in my life. I think this research transcends the politics of the candidates, or politics in general, and really makes me, and hopefully others, think about how we view women in our society and whether we can set our predetermined biases aside to ultimately make our world a more equity-driven place. In the end, this topic is my passion and I hope that is evident in this work.

This project would not be possible without a great deal of people in my life. I am forever indebted to my parents, Marc Pinckney and June Boyer, for helping me to become a lifelong learner and thinker and for instilling in me the notion that the sky really is my limit and there is no glass ceiling that I cannot break if I so choose. To my boyfriend and partner, Jon, whose patience seems to know no limits and constant encouragement and support throughout this process is literally what got me through. Lastly, thank you to my many friends and family, whom all I love with every fiber of my

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Introduction

Today, in the 21st century, one of the most serious problems facing American politics is the stark inequality that continues to exist between men and women in regards to political representation. This inequality is commonly known as the political glass ceiling. Women make up over half of the entire United States population, but are not adequately represented in political positions, particularly in Congress. In fact, women hold less than 20% of the 535 seats in Congress. In recent years, there has been a great deal of hype about and focus upon the “progress” that women have made, but there has been a fair amount of writing and research that says this progress might not be as overwhelming as some like to think. It appears these inequalities in political representation do not exist because there are not enough qualified women to run for political office, but actually, many academics note that these inequalities exist because extenuating factors keep qualified women from being elected. One serious factor in the inability of women to break the political glass ceiling appears to be the influence of today’s media. Media in the 21st century is a strong entity, with a 24-hour news cycle in addition to social media outlets, whose representation of women does little to help them achieve political success, say experts on the subject media representation of female politicians. Although women in the United States continue to make strides in putting cracks in the political glass ceiling, the progress is entirely too slow and gaping inequalities still exist despite much public opinion that says men and women are socially seen to be on an “equal playing field.” While it is quite clear that women are not adequately represented in Congress and have never held the esteemed position of

President of the United States of America, the reasons why are expansive and there are differing opinions to the severity of these problems that cause this lack of representation.

As research into the political glass ceiling has developed over the past 30 years, one of the strongest conclusions of researchers is that media plays a serious role in debasing and degrading female candidates and politicians. Media especially in today's world, where citizens, a.k.a. voters, are inundated via television, social media, talk radio and the like, is a powerful portrayal of political candidates. Research shows, media, however it is taken in, can influence what voters learn about candidates as well as the criteria voters use when evaluating candidates, thereby directly influencing how they may cast a vote.¹ What much of the research shows is that media is not necessarily gender-balanced. This inaccurate media coverage is particularly damaging because it potentially undermines female candidates' and politicians' credibility with voters.²

The most apparent of these misrepresentations is stereotyping. A study conducted by interviewing the press secretaries of female politicians found that little had changed regarding media coverage over the course of these politicians' careers. Elizabeth Holtzman, a Democrat from New York, experienced the same level of damaging stereotypes over the 20 years she was a member of Congress.³ Some of the stereotypes most often portrayed in the media include "sex object" stereotypes, such as focusing primarily on clothing and physical appearance as well as feminine personality traits, and "the mother stereotype" which either identifies the female as caring, understanding and

¹ Kim Fridkin Kahn and Edie N. Goldenberg, "Women Candidates in the News: An Examination of Gender Differences in U.S. Senate Campaign Coverage," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 55, 2 (1991): 180-199.

² David Niven and Jeremy Zilber, "How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress?," *Women & Politics* 23, 1-2 (2001).

³ Niven and Zilber, "How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress?".

nurturing, or unable to provide adequate leadership because of femininity and maternal responsibilities.⁴ These types of stereotypes are a serious challenge for female candidates because stereotypes dictate the roles people are expected to fulfill.⁵

It is hard to disagree with this literature regarding media's influence on promoting these stereotypes. This is especially true when one sees the blatant examples they use in their works, including *The New York Times* writers labeling 2008 Vice Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin "Caribou Barbie" and 2008 Presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton as "a scolding mother, talking down to children."⁶ What is most notable, however, is the constant focus throughout all of the literature that primarily places the blame on the media for these inaccurate and degrading stereotypes placed on female candidates and politicians.

What does not seem to exist in abundance is adequate literature since 2010. While that is just five years in the past, a great deal has occurred in terms of the political glass ceiling and women's issues in that short time period. Research certainly needs to be conducted to determine whether women have made any progress with any of the challenges, such as the barriers they face when considering running and the barriers they face in getting elected. 2008 was an important year for female politicians, not in terms of them being elected, but in terms of them running for major political positions in the executive realm. Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin did a great deal to put huge cracks in the

⁴ Diana B. Carlin and Kelly L. Winfrey, "Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage," *Communication Studies* 60, 4 (2009): 326-343; Niven and Zilber, "How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress?"

⁵ Lindsey Meeks, "Is She 'Man Enough'? Women Candidates, Executive Political Offices and News Coverage," *Journal of Communication* 62(2012):175-193

⁶ Carlin and Winfrey, "Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage."

political glass ceiling.⁷ Despite that being the case, little writing exists on the topic and the writing that does exist focuses almost entirely on the negative media coverage both candidates received throughout their campaigns. There is a great need for more updated literature on whether we can see Palin's and Clinton's candidacies as successes, as well as whether other women continue to face the same challenges and barriers as they did some ten or twenty years ago.

My research closely looks at some of the recent female candidates for a number of political positions: President and Vice President of the United States and the United States Congress. It gives context to much of the research that has already been done by giving copious examples of times in which the media was biased against female politicians and how this may or may not have affected their candidacies. This aspect of my research is grounded heavily on the research of those before me. Additionally, during my initial literature review, I found that much of the research was heavily outdated, so this research aims to update the research by studying female candidates who have run for some form of office in the last seven years. Because as few seats are filled by women today, in 2015, even fewer were held by women during the time that much of the research on this topic was being conducted. Studying "The Year of the Woman," 1992, when media was not considered to be the powerful beast it is today and when there were only nine female Senators, as opposed to the twenty we now have, is different than studying today's 24 hour media and social media cycle.

⁷ Caroline Heldman and Lisa Wade. "Sexualizing Sarah Palin." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 65, no. 3-4 (08, 2011): 156-164. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9984-6>.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/896181440?accountid=11752>; Meeks, "Is She 'Man Enough'? Women Candidates, Executive Political Offices and News Coverage;" Carlin and Winfrey, "Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage."

This thesis is a series of case studies into, Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and the women who have run and been elected to the United States Congress, both House and Senate. My research closely looks at the media portrayals of these particular candidates and with support from the research before me analyzes whether the media, mostly print and digital newspapers and magazines, but some TV and talk show as well, accurately, fairly and in an unbiased manner, portrays women candidates based on their qualifications as opposed to on their sex.

The political glass ceiling is a subject that has been written on for thirty plus years and what is clearly known based on that literature is that little has changed in that time period. Women face some significant challenges in the lead up to running for election, as political candidates, and even once they are elected. There is still a great deal of research to be done on this subject, however. The political glass ceiling is a constantly evolving subject that writers and readers are equally passionate about. This can create biases in the research and in the on-going conversation. Additionally, as time goes on, new biases, opinions and inequalities can grow and develop, making the political glass ceiling an ever-changing topic. What is quite clear, however, is the importance of this research and literature for the future of the country and its government. Equal representation in Congress and the Executive Branch is only fair in a country that is half comprised of women. As long as women are being kept out of these offices, in part because of biases, misrepresentations and stereotypes, the work must be done to understand why, so that citizens and politicians alike can change these inequalities.

1

Sarah Palin:

Public Life from the Pundit's Perspective

Senator and Presidential hopeful John McCain announced Sarah Palin, the female Republican governor from Alaska, as his Vice Presidential candidate on August 29, 2008. The news shocked people across the world, as she was a fairly unknown politician and an unexpected choice. This addition to the 2008 Republican ticket also, metaphorically speaking, added additional cracks to the “18 million cracks” Hillary Clinton had put into the glass ceiling with her run for President in the 2008 Primary on the Democratic ticket.⁸ Palin, much like Clinton before her and the many women who will come after her, represented a moment in time where women, young and old, Democrat and Republican, everywhere across the country, could see that the barriers to women rising to the most powerful positions in the world were coming down.

There is a great deal of research on these stereotypes and a great deal of research on media influence, but little on the connection between the two. This analysis of media coverage of Sarah Palin during the 2008 primary elections is aimed at shedding light on the intersection of these stereotypes and media coverage of female candidates.

Palin’s nomination represented a moment when women were beginning to be taken more seriously as likely candidates for the most executive positions of elected office. Palin was particularly of interest as the first ever Republican woman to be on the Vice Presidential ticket. While her addition to the ticket represented an exciting moment for women, she faced many challenges that she and others quickly realized were specific to her sex rather than her political capabilities. Palin instantly became an example of the many struggles and challenges that women have faced for centuries, such as gender

⁸ Dana Milbank, “A Thank-You for 18 Million Cracks in the Glass Ceiling,” *The Washington Post*, June 8, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/06/07/AR2008060701879.html>.

stereotyping, and facing additional questioning about their qualifications and their dedication to their familial responsibilities. Women who come after her are likely to have to face and be cautious of many of the same trials when running for executive elected office.

When Sarah Palin entered the 2008 election, she knew she would garner both attention and criticism that her male Democratic counterpart, Joe Biden, and the other male candidates would not face. It can be debated that Hillary Clinton had paved a path for Palin during her own race for the Presidency. In fact, Senator McCain may have even picked Palin as his running mate to capitalize on gaining the “women’s vote” from those who were disappointed to see then Senator Clinton lose the nomination. Senator Clinton had also shown women across the country that they would face different and additional challenges, such as stepping outside traditional gender roles and facing gender stereotypes that their male counterparts did not face. Palin chose to address these biases head on, while Clinton often did not, in an interview with Jill Zuckman of the *Chicago Tribune* in October 2008, Palin remarked:

I think Hillary Clinton was held to a different standard in her primary race. Do you remember the conversations that took place about her, say superficial things that they don’t talk about with men, her wardrobe and her hair styles, all of that? That’s a bit of that double standard. But I’m not going to complain about it, I’m not going to whine about it, I’m going to plow through that, because we are embarking on something greater than that, than allowing that double standard to adversely affect us.⁹

⁹ Jill Zuckman, “‘If people only knew how frugal we are,’” *Chicago Tribune*, October 24, 2008, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2008-10-24/news/0810240133_1_sarah-palin-first-newspaper-interviews-clothes.

While many admired her tenacity and her choice to face such biases and criticisms directly, Palin faced immense challenges that the male candidates in the race did not face, especially in regards to dealing with gender stereotyping by the media. Despite her pledge to “plow through,” doing just that proved not to be enough. Even though Palin made major efforts to ignore the double standard and not let it negatively affect her and McCain’s candidacy, it shaped the discussions about the election nationwide.

Palin presents an interesting example of the victim of a direct and obvious media bias, as well as a general stereotyping of female candidates. As one of the most publicly unknown women to ever run for major political office, media and public scrutiny of her as a candidate was particularly focused on her appearance, her personal history, and her private story more so than to her political qualifications and her ability to fulfill the needs of the position. This is unusual in that there was minor focus, especially in the time immediately following McCain’s announcement, on Palin’s stance on the issues, political history, or competence for the position of Vice President. Unlike a Clinton-type candidate, whose qualifications are hard to dispute no matter which side of the aisle one resides, the public’s and the media’s general concern with Palin’s qualifications for Vice President, or lack thereof, was deficient, as she was a generally unknown first term Governor from Alaska.

Despite the great amount of media attention Palin received, her qualifications as a politician who could potentially be elected to one of the highest elected offices was addressed by the media only second to addressing her physical and familial makeup. The importance of the general understanding of where a candidate stands on the many issues they are likely to face or encounter, should they take office, is immense. In fact, research

shows that media can influence what voters learn about candidates. Media can also influence the criteria voters use when evaluating candidates, thereby directly influencing how they may cast a vote.¹⁰ The media pundits' inability to focus on the relevant facts related to each candidate, as opposed to the physical appearance and personal issues surrounding female candidates, poses a serious problem and threat for electoral politics in America, especially as more women choose to enter into the field. Biased information is likely to hurt female candidates' abilities to be elected to office immensely and will seriously affect the ability to level the playing field and ultimately break the political glass ceiling. As I will show, the biased media attention women face increases the challenges, although it is just one of many, for women running for elected office, notably for President. The additional scrutiny women face as candidates also influences those who take in such media, as well as the voters and citizens who both elect the candidate and are directly affected by that candidate should they win election. Sarah Palin exists as an almost perfect example of when exceedingly biased attention directly influences voter understanding of the candidate as a whole. While this was not the only factor that contributed to the ultimate loss for McCain and Palin, much of the research shows it was a definite factor, amongst others, including a well run grassroots campaign by the opponent. As one of very few women to be nominated to the Republican ticket, this chapter will look at media coverage of Sarah Palin in regards to two typical stereotypes female candidates face: "The Mommy Problem" and the sexualization of the female as

¹⁰ Kim Fridkin Kahn and Edie N. Goldenberg, Women candidates in the news: An examination of gender differences in U.S. senate campaign coverage.

examples of moments when the presumed media biases may have influenced Palin's candidacy.

“The Mommy Problem”

Women are mothers, men are fathers. This is an important stereotype to review. In American culture, it is often expected that women are the caretakers and men are the providers, women are nurturing and men are strong, etc. While these are the “expectations,” they do not always hold up, especially in modern times when men and women do not stick within the confines of predetermined gender roles. As discussed in the research on the political glass ceiling, the issue of female politicians and their sometimes, additional role as mothers, is something women politicians are clearly going to experience exponentially more than men. Chang and Hitchon report, “Simply put, politics is more ‘normal’ for men, with the result that his gender does not play as distinctive a role for a male politician as her gender plays for a female politician.”¹¹ Our society has always placed a considerable amount of the burden of raising a family on the mother. Now that gender roles are changing and women are just as likely, if not more likely, to be the primary wage earner in a family, this discussion has changed for the most part. Slowly, people are more able to see and understand that mothers and fathers can, in fact, share parenting duties quite equally. However, it seems as soon as a woman wants to do what men have done for years, like run for political office, there is a heightened level of criticism towards female candidates for causing harm and unnecessary stress on their families.

¹¹ Chingching Chang and Jacqueline Hitchon, “Mass Media Impact on Voter Response to Women Candidates: Theoretical Development,” *Communication Theory* 7, 1 (1997): 29-52.

Female candidates are constantly questioned on their abilities to handle both raising and managing a family while handling the many duties and tasks that are expected of an elected politician. This is a question rarely posed to fathers who choose to run for political office. Moreover, this appears to have to do with the fact that even while our society becomes more fair and equal, women are often still considered the primary care providers to their families – the cooks, the cleaners, and the caregivers – while men are considered to be the breadwinners, the wage earners, and the supporters in the financial sense of the word. Until these notions of the appropriate roles for men and women are changed completely for the better, female politicians will continue to face biased feedback from the media and the public.

In an analysis of print media coverage of Vice Presidential candidates between 1984 and 2008, Caroline Heldman, Sarah Oliver, and Meredith Conroy, who have studied the media coverage of Vice Presidential candidates focusing particularly on the few women in that category, make some interesting observations about female candidates and the scrutiny they receive regarding their families in comparison to their male counterparts. They remark:

While it is difficult to compare the relative weight of scandals, it appears that female vice presidential candidates received more scrutiny than their male competitors, especially when it comes to issues involving their family. Cheney dealt with the “scandal” of having a gay daughter, or rather, his family’s complicated “denial” of it. Quayle, a candidate who ran on a “family values” platform, received virtually no coverage about a Florida house he shared with three other members of congress and lobbyists/*Playboy* model, Paula Parkinson. Reporters seem to focus less

on the families of male vice presidential candidates, especially when it comes to scandals.¹²

This is extremely biased behavior on the part of the media, which is then passed on to the consumers of that media. While it is unacceptable for the media or voters to delve deeply into the personal lives of politicians, especially when it is not directly connected to their ability to perform the functions of their job, if they are going to participate in such actions, it should not be biased against women. If the media is going to insist on providing the public with such theatrics, then it should be done fairly across gender lines.

Sarah Palin fully encountered the “mommy problem” in her time on the Republican ticket. Palin entered the 2008 campaign as a wife and a mother of five children, most of whom were quite young, and all under the age of 21 at the time of her announcement. In addition to having five young children who still required “mothering,” Palin’s youngest son, Trig, had Down’s Syndrome and her oldest daughter, Bristol, announced her pregnancy days after Palin became the Vice Presidential candidate. She was 18 years old at the time and unmarried. Lois Romano of the Washington Post remarked,

It's quite a compelling image: An accomplished -- even glamorous -- working mother, projecting to the world that she can and does have it all: five children, a successful career and a husband who doesn't mind being Mr. Mom. Oh, and she's going to be a grandmother, and her infant has special needs, and she's running for vice president.

The facts of life for Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin are fascinating and seem, frankly, exhausting. Her children range in age from 18 years to 4 months. Track, the oldest, recently enlisted in the Army and is headed for Iraq. Daughter Willow, 14, is in high school, and Piper is 7. The baby, Trig,

¹² Caroline Heldman, “From Ferraro to Palin: Sexism in Media Coverage of Female Vice Presidential Candidates,” *Presented at the Annual meeting of the American Political Association*, Toronto, Canada, September 2-5th, 2009.

was born in April with Down syndrome. Daughter Bristol, 17, is pregnant and is going to get married, her parents announced yesterday. That news added fuel to an already heated debate on blogs and in the street about the appropriate balance between child-rearing and working -- and whether Palin can balance the extraordinary demands of both without shortchanging either.

Within two hours of The Washington Post reporting news of the pregnancy on its Web site, more than 1,000 people had weighed in, arguing back and forth about whether Palin, 44, is placing her own political ambition above the needs of her family.¹³

What stands out about this excerpt is the comment, "The Washington Post reporting news of the pregnancy on its Web site."¹⁴ While Romano is focused on Palin as a mother and how she will juggle the many challenges she now faces, she also makes it clear she thinks it is important to report on Palin as a mother and the upcoming events happening in the life of Palin's children. The whole article, entitled "Gov. Mom; The Land of the Midnight Sun's New Claim to Fame: Being Led by a 24-Hour Mother" focuses on Palin's family life and whether this disqualifies her from being capable to hold the Vice Presidency with its competing interests to that of raising a family.

Romano's article goes on to quote other male candidates who comment on the coverage of and focus on her family. Romano quotes, "'She should not be held to a different standard than the Democratic nominee," said McCain senior adviser Steve Schmidt yesterday. 'No male candidate would ever be asked that question. . . . I think women in America are likely to be angered by the double standards. This isn't the 1950s...' Sen. Barack Obama told reporters: 'How a family deals with issues and teenage children, that shouldn't be the topic of our politics.'"¹⁵ These comments being quoted in the article alongside Romano's one thousand words strictly on Palin as a mother and how

¹³ Lois Romano, "Gov. Mom," *The Washington Post*, September 2, 2008.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/01/AR2008090102998_pf.html

¹⁴ Lois Romano, "Gov. Mom."

¹⁵ Lois Romano, "Gov. Mom."

it makes her attempt for the Vice Presidency a daunting one are quite ironic. Even while quoting McCain's advisor and Barack Obama, both of whom point out that Palin's family life and double standards placed on women are inappropriate, Romano spends the rest of the article placing those double standards on Palin and relating her family to her ability to work in politics.

While discussing media attention on female politicians' roles as mothers, it is also worth noting that Senator Barack Obama, the Democratic candidate for President during the 2008 elections, had two young children and faced minimal criticism, compared to Palin on his decision to run for the highest office in the land. There was little discussion about how that decision might affect his family and their well-being. In fact, when doing a simple search for news articles that contained the words "Barack Obama" and "daughters" only four articles came up, two on the topic of Michelle Obama, one on Sarah Palin, that simply mentioned Obama had two daughters, and a final article listing the number and names of all the candidates' children. When doing a simple search of "Barack Obama" and "father," almost all of the articles listed related to his book or his own father. Obama's decision to run for office despite having young children who still required his attention was not scrutinized to the extent that Palin's was. It certainly brings up the question of whether he would have experienced such criticisms and judgment if he were a female or if Palin would have experienced the same level of scrutiny if she were a male. It is safe to say the media coverage would have looked different had their genders been reversed.

The media quickly honed in on Palin's large family and her, personally, for having various familial responsibilities with so many unusual or additional

circumstances. The press analyzed and harshly criticized Palin's decision to run for the Vice Presidency, putting her family's needs second only to her own. In research conducted on the media analysis of Sarah Palin, a number of examples of criticisms of Palin "abandoning" her family to run for Vice President are recognized:

The weekend after John McCain's announcement of Sarah Plain, John Roberts of *CNN* asked whether it was appropriate for Sarah Palin to accept the vice-presidential nomination given the magnitude of her current family responsibilities. Radio talk show host, Ed Schulz, on *CNN* a few days later said that Governor Palin would not be able to focus on her job given her family distractions. And, *ABC*'s Bill Weir accused her of neglecting her children by running for vice president.¹⁶

Whether it is true or not that Palin should have been more concerned with her family than running for Vice President, it should not have been a point of discussion or analysis by the media, nor should it have been a point of discussion for the general public. The private business of the Palin family should not have been fodder for the media pundits no matter Palin's decision to put herself in the limelight. Despite the public nature of the profession and the need for most candidates to have their families on the campaign trail with them, this does not necessarily mean that families should be openly covered by the media, as they are not the candidate running for election. The public is expected to elect people for office based on their qualifications for the job, or at least that is what the theory of electoral politics and representative democracy suggests; coverage of Palin

¹⁶ Gina Serigenese Woodall, Kim L. Fridkin, and Jill Carle, "Sarah Palin: 'Beauty is Beastly?' An Exploratory Content Analysis of Media Coverage," in *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, edited by Rainbow Murray, 91. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010.

stands as an example of the media's failure to focus on the most important aspects of the candidate, her qualifications, and her views. This media commentary stands as an example of focusing on the "fluff" of the behind the scenes of a campaign rather than reporting of substantive facts and information in as an objective manner as possible to provide accurate and unbiased news coverage to their viewers.

With the increased participation of the media in elections, and the vicious, drama-filled, 24-hour media cycle, the media and the public have become far more concerned with the candidates' personal lives than their qualifications for the actual office they are running for. Candidates will often have their personal lives and family affected, to a significant degree, by the act of being elected to office. This inevitable scenario is a personal concern of the candidates, and thus should not be a legitimate area of focus for the voting public or the media. A problem with the spectacle the media often puts on is that the public increasingly is more concerned with personal aspects of a candidate's life than his or her qualifications. This problem leads to the election of poorly qualified candidates or candidates who the voters know little about regarding actual policy and issues needing to be addressed within their elected office.

While the gender of the candidates clearly affects the type of media attention they are likely to receive, the sex of the reporter is a fascinating aspect of this media bias. During her short run for Vice President, not only did Palin face serious criticism, she also received a number of general critiques of her behavior and decision-making skills as a mother. This calls attention to another problem with media commentary on female candidates: the knowledge the reporter may have on the subject of motherhood or generally being a woman. In a 2008 opinion editorial in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, Kurt

Greenbaum asks, “Should a mother of five children, including an infant with Down’s syndrome, be running for the second highest office in the land? Are her priorities misplaced?”¹⁷ This is an interesting comment to analyze for many reasons, primarily because it is a male reporter from the media posing the question. Firstly, Kurt Greenbaum has never been a mother. Secondly, even as a social media commentator who likely tries to be controversial to get more readers, it is not part of his job responsibility to the public to question Palin’s personal decisions, especially those personal decisions that he has no way of relating and especially when it may be a determinant of public opinion. Mr. Greenbaum, never having been a woman or a mother, is not in a position to criticize and question this personal decision, nor was that his job in reporting on McCain’s running mate decision. Additionally, by writing an opinion piece in a newspaper readily available to the public, Greenbaum effectively poses his question to the general public who then likely thinks about and ponders his question themselves. This would most likely lead them to form opinions about Palin’s personal decisions, which, while they have the right to do so, is not crucial or helpful to the process of electing the best team for President and Vice President.

Greenbaum was certainly not the only person to make a comment like this. In September 2008, the *Denver Post* printed a letter to the editor that read, “Sarah Palin is the mother of a newborn with Down syndrome and of an unwed teenager who will be delivering in December - a time when she apparently plans to be spending 18 hour days

¹⁷ Woodall, Fridkin, and Carle, “Sarah Palin: ‘Beauty is Beastly?’ An Exploratory Content Analysis of Media Coverage.”

transitioning in Washington...”¹⁸ While this is technically not the work of a journalist, the *Denver Post*, a well-known and circulated paper in the Denver, Colorado area and is read by hundreds of thousands of people. The choice of the newspaper’s editors to include that particular letter says something about the message they are trying to convey to their readers. These types of opinion pieces and posturing about extraneous subjects lead media users, the voters, off track on what they are to consider as important when electing an official.

This increased level of disparagement was common during the 2008 election, but was often found from the mouths and pens of female writers who many would expect to be more aware of existing media bias. *Vanity Fair* ran an article by Evgenia Peretz titled, “Sarah Palin’s Mommy Problem.” Peretz had harsh words and criticism regarding Palin’s priorities and decision to run for Vice President:

In this day and age, plenty of women make the decision that they will not be the primary caretaker of their children. That might be hard to swallow for some, but that’s progress... But if that’s the case, and, if, like Palin, you returned to work three days after your Down’s syndrome son was born, you don’t get ‘hockey mom’ bragging rights to boot. You can’t have it both ways.¹⁹

The assumption that Peretz makes is that Palin is trying to “have it both ways” by bragging about being a politician and a mother. Peretz’s statement implies it is imperative that Palin have it one way or another. That should not be the case and is an inappropriate thing for a writer to surmise in such a well-known magazine as *Vanity Fair* with high

¹⁸ “Letters to the Editor,” *The Denver Post*, September 7, 2008, <http://blogs.denverpost.com/eletters/2008/09/page/13/>.

¹⁹ Evgenia Peretz, “Sarah Palin’s Mommy Problem,” *Vanity Fair*, September 1, 2008, <http://www.vanityfair.com/online/politics/2008/09/sarah-palins-mommy-problem.html>.

readership. Women, certainly more so than men, understand the struggles many women have faced to get where they are today and the challenges that still exist in breaking down gender stereotypes and challenging societal norms. If anything, female reporters, while providing their audience with factual, substantive news and information, should remind the public of how far women have come and how capable they are to handle all the many challenges they may face in their years as mothers, career women, or the like. Such behavior by female journalists denigrates the work they produce and the professionalism they wish to exude. Female journalists should instead be creating a platform or forum for women candidates to promote themselves in a positive, unbiased light.

The criticisms of Palin as a woman and a mother and her decision to run are not under the purview of the media. Citizens should be relying on the media to provide them with the facts, not a judgment of the quality of a candidate's family decisions. This is especially the case if the media is only going to comment on the candidate's personal decisions, rather than put them into the context of how she might make decisions as an elected official. Unless the media can point out real and true concerns about how the candidate's personal family life will influence the job she will do as a politician, it really should not come under discussion in a news article, on a news television show, or any other media outlet as it is biased against women.

It is, again, worth noting the gender of those making these remarks. From the examples provided here so far, most of the comments made about Palin's decision to run for Vice President, despite her family responsibilities, are made by male journalists. These men have never and will never face the challenges that Palin was presented with when asked by McCain to run, and therefore are in no way, shape or form qualified to be

commenting on the matter unless, of course, they have a background in family counseling or psychology. However, in these cases, they are primarily political pundits. This again points to the fact that it is their main and sole responsibility to address the politics and qualifications of these candidates and campaigns; they are not qualified to be providing the public with judgment, analysis, or criticism on female family decision-making. By instead choosing focus on the more “entertaining” pieces of information, it shows they are simply in the business of getting ratings.

While it is just generally offensive that the media would disparage a woman for wanting to be both a politician and a mother, as if that was bad or something to be ashamed of, it is most appalling that this behavior is so prevalent. Assessment of the focus of the media on Palin’s family shows just how imbedded this behavior is in media culture:

When we look at the number of times that Sarah Palin’s family is mentioned in her coverage, we find that her marital status is mentioned in more than one-third (34%) of the stories examined and her husband and family are mentioned 26 percent of the time. To put these numbers in perspective, Sarah Palin’s ideology was mentioned just as often as her family, 26 percent of the time. And, Sarah Palin’s views regarding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan received sparse coverage compared to the focus on her family. In particular, 8 percent and 5 percent of the stories about Sarah Palin discussed Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively.²⁰

While the examples from the media of the harsh criticisms are daunting and frustrating, to say the least, the numbers are also disappointing, especially when realizing how dependent today’s electorate is on the media for their coverage of the candidates. From these numbers alone, it is clear that Palin, and women candidates much like her, cannot

²⁰ Woodall, Fridkin, and Carle, “Sarah Palin: ‘Beauty is Beastly?’ An Exploratory Content Analysis of Media Coverage.”

expect the media to cover the issues as effectively or fairly, nor as often as they are likely to cover her personal life and family decisions. This is so daunting because these are candidates we potentially elect to the highest offices possible in the country. If the media, who is expected to inform the electorate, is not doing so, then the proper candidates may not be elected to office. In the case of Palin, there were many major concerns about her qualifications for office. However, the media's scrutiny of her family decisions limited the time the media was able to spend pointing out these distressing and important problems with her qualifications. While these deficiencies eventually came to light, they were muddled in with commentary on her family, her appearance, and various biased comments.

The focus on what is commonly called "the Mommy Problem" may have directly influenced and affected Palin's electability. Many voters may have taken to heart what was expressed to them via the media and discerned that Palin's duty was to her family and not to her country. While that is an acceptable feeling for people to have, it is not acceptable when the candidate's actual qualifications are not set in front of the electorate in a clear, balanced, and unbiased manner. Additionally, there is no factual evidence that women are not capable of being both mothers and politicians. In Marianne Schnall's new book titled, *What Will it Take to Make a Woman President?*, she discusses that question with a variety of politicians, leaders, and public officials. Mary Fallin, the first female Governor of Oklahoma told Schnall the story of being a single mother while taking care of her ill mother for a portion of the twelve years she was Lieutenant Governor of Oklahoma. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York also told Schnall, "...that there is a way that you can be part of the decision-making fabric of this country and still be a good

mother.”²¹ As is apparent through the examples given here, the media’s role in propagating and extending the shelf life of traditional gender roles is extensive. The assumption made by such remarks in the media is that women are not capable of simultaneously being good mothers and good politicians. Both mothers and politicians disagree with this notion, and when given the opportunity they often disprove it.

The Sex Symbol

To the public and to the media, Sarah Palin was not just a mom, but she was a hot mom, a sexy mom, and a mom wearing fancy, expensive clothes. Not only did the media focus heavily on the fact that Sarah Palin was a mother of five and a wife, but they also focused heavily on the fact that she was a fairly young, attractive woman who dressed nicely. In fact, they could hardly go a day of the campaign without mentioning it in one way or another.

Constant and biased commentary focused on the physical appearance of the female candidate is not only degrading to the candidate, but it is unfair as well. It is, in part, the responsibility of the media to provide the public with well-rounded information about the candidate and her background, rather than focusing on her physical appearance. No matter one’s opinion of Palin, it is easy to see that the media paid undue attention to her and was too focused on her personal life and her physical appearance, as opposed to the things that truly mattered, such as her politics. As a relatively unknown politician, the expectation would be that much of the coverage be informative and informational, a way

²¹ Diana Reese, “Book asks ‘What Will it Take to Make a Woman President?’”, *The Washington Post*, December 5, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2013/12/05/book-asks-what-will-it-take-to-make-a-woman-president/>.

for the public to learn what kind of candidate Palin was and what kind of Vice President she might be. It was not. Nathan Heflick and Jamie Goldenberg examined the effects of media objectification of Sarah Palin:

We also found evidence that focusing on Palin's appearance led to reduced intentions to vote for the McCain–Palin ticket in the 2008 US Presidential election. Further, perceptions of competence and humanness played a mediating role, such that appearance–focus lowered perceived human essence and competence, which in turn reduced intentions to vote for John McCain. It is not possible to know whether such effects contributed to people's actual voting behavior the day of the election, as there clearly are other factors that likely swayed voters in favor of Obama–Biden (in this study, all Democrats intended to vote for that ticket). However, given the media's focus on Palin's appearance prior to the election, it is possible that people came to see her as less fully human (more robotic) and competent than they would have without this focus, and in turn, that they became even less likely to vote for her as a result (a more robotic, less competent candidate is certainly less desirable).²²

As is evidenced in some of the examples below, the media coverage of Ms. Palin was often sexualized in nature and could have altered voting behaviors. While it may not have been the determining factor in the McCain-Palin loss, research does show that it was likely a factor nonetheless.

The superficial nature and focus of the media did not begin with Sarah Palin. Many of the women who ran for elected office before her faced similar criticism in analysis. However, it did reach a new high during the 2008 primary election. CNN news anchor, Campbell Brown pointed out the biased nature of the media's reporting in her *No Bias, No Bull* segment in October of 2008, during the elections:

²² Nathan Heflick and Jamie Goldenberg, "Objectifying Sarah Palin: Evidence that Objectification Causes Women to be Perceived as Less Competent and Less Fully Human," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45 (March 1, 2009): 598.

My issue? There is an incredible double standard here, and we're ignoring a very simple reality. Women are judged based on their appearance far, far more than men. This is a statement of fact. There has been plenty of talk and plenty written about Sarah Palin's jackets, her hair, her looks. Sound familiar? There was plenty of talk and plenty written about Hillary Clinton's looks, hair, pantsuits. Compare that to the attention given to Barack Obama's \$1,500 suits or John McCain's \$520 Ferragamo shoes. There is no comparison. Women get scrutinized based on appearance far more than men...My point is, for women, unfortunately, appearance is part of the job... All women in the public eye deal with this issue...you may complain, as some have, it's hypocritical to sell yourself as a small-town hockey mom when you're wearing designer clothes. That's fine. Just don't ignore the fact that there is a double standard here. And, personally, I think, in this campaign, with so much at stake, this is a peripheral issue. I myself have raised plenty of questions about Sarah Palin, much to the annoyance of the McCain campaign. But those questions have been about her qualifications and experience, never her appearance. Let's keep the focus on what really matters here.²³

While Campbell Brown was astutely aware of the bias towards women during the 2008 election and took measures to ensure that her reporting was above board and double standard-free, many of her fellow anchors were not so kind or aware.

For the Republican Party, Rush Limbaugh is one of the best-known political commentators and has a popular radio show, “The Rush Limbaugh Show.” His website states the show is “the most listened to radio talk show in America, broadcast on over 600 radio stations nationwide.”²⁴ He is certainly an outlet Conservatives look to in order to get their news and information, politically speaking. On August 29, 2008, just days after

²³ “Commentary: For Women in Public Eye, Looks Matter,” Campbell Brown, *No Bias, no Bull* 2008, aired October 23, 2008, on CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/22/campbell.brown.looks/index.html?eref=#cnnSTCVideo>.

²⁴ “Governor Sarah Palin: Story and Experience Dwarf Barack Obama,” Rush Limbaugh, *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, August 29, 2008, http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2008/08/29/governor_sarah_palin_story_and_experience_dwarf_barack_obama2.

the announcement by John McCain of naming Sarah Palin as his running mate, Limbaugh took to his radio show to discuss this choice in running mates. Instead of first discussing her qualifications for office, or a little background about how she might have come to be chosen by McCain, Limbaugh started by focusing specifically on her appearance. He remarked, “John McCain gets it. She is a maverick pick! She is a total maverick pick. We’re the ones that have the babe on the ticket... We have a conservative, real woman. This woman hunts moose. This woman fishes. This woman is an athlete! This is an inspired choice. This is absolutely fabulous.”²⁵ In some of his first observations on Sarah Palin, he felt compelled to not only focus on the fact that she was a woman over and over again, but also that she was a “babe.”

This commentary, by a trusted source for many, gives citizens absolutely no insight into the political leanings of Palin. It is Limbaugh’s job as a political commentator, and a well-respected, well-known commentator at that, to provide his listeners and followers with the pertinent information for them to be able to make informed decisions about the politicians they may elect to office. For him to label Palin “an inspired choice” and qualify that comment by calling her “a babe,” he is in no way informing his viewers about the things that matter about Palin. He is instead, blatantly objectifying her. While Mr. Limbaugh is not necessarily a traditional newscaster, even as a staunch Republican supporter, he simply makes matters worse when addressing Ms. Palin as a sex symbol as opposed to discussing her in more “appropriate” terms.

Limbaugh was just one of many trusted sources who took to commenting on Palin based on her appearance throughout the election. One of Sarah Palin’s biggest critics,

²⁵ “Governor Sarah Palin: Story and Experience Dwarf Barack Obama,” Rush Limbaugh.

who took many opportunities to objectify her and helped solidify her presence in the media as a “sex symbol,” was Maureen Dowd, an opinion writer for the *New York Times*. What is most interesting about Dowd’s pieces on Palin is that she is a woman writing about another woman. She is a woman who was uninhibited in continuously critiquing the appearance of Sarah Palin, who was a fellow woman in a public position. In one of her first writings on Palin, on August 31, 2008, titled “Vice in Go-Go Boots,” Dowd makes numerous comments about the physical appearance of Palin, belittling her numerous times:

The guilty pleasure I miss most when I’m out slogging on the campaign trail is the chance to sprawl on the chaise and watch a vacuously spunky and generically sassy chick flick. So imagine my delight, my absolute astonishment, when the hokey chick flick came out on the trail, a Cinderella story so preposterous it’s hard to believe it’s not premiering on Lifetime. Instead of going home and watching “Miss Congeniality” with Sandra Bullock, I get to stay here and watch “Miss Congeniality” with Sarah Palin. Sheer heaven. It’s easy to see where this movie is going. It begins, of course, with a cute, cool unknown from Alaska who has never even been on “Meet the Press” triumphing over a cute, cool unknowable from Hawaii who has been on “Meet the Press” a lot.²⁶

Dowd even goes so far as to argue that it is insulting that women always get picked by male candidates as the “hail Mary pass,” all the while objectifying Palin and classifying her in many non-political, informative terms such as “hockey mom,” “zealot,” and “former beauty queen.” Dowd’s piece is extremely critical of Palin, but it gives little mention of her past as a Mayor or Governor, or even her qualifications for elected office. She begins the piece by mentioning that she frequents the campaign trail, leading the

²⁶ Maureen Dowd, “Vice in Go-Go boots?”, *The New York Times*, August 31, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/31/opinion/31dowd.html?_r=1&.

reader to believe she is qualified to comment on the campaign and those on the ticket. She proceeds to objectify Palin left and right, making her sound unqualified and intellectually subpar. Dowd's piece is demeaning and provides the reader with no valuable information to use or interpret when trying to make a decision about which candidate to support.

In addition to expecting more from Dowd, in terms of unbiased and informative political commentary, it is surprising that as a woman, she is not more cautious about objectifying Palin. She seems to have no care about calling her "Barbie" and other various sexist and offensive labels.²⁷ Research shows that women reporters and news anchors are, in fact, tougher on women politicians than men are especially in regards to encouraging gender stereotyping in the media. Murray's research finds that "stories anchored only by men discuss Governor Palin's appearance less often than stories anchored by only women or stories anchored by both men and women... [and] about 11 percent of the stories discussed by male anchors mention her appearance, while women anchors are twice as likely (22%) to discuss her appearance..."²⁸ The fact that female candidates cannot even count on other women in the media to avoid the objectification and stereotyping of women is disheartening and represents a true problem with the media today. Women naturally tend to have a bond with other women, but it appears female

²⁷ Maureen Dowd, "A Makeover with an Ugly Gloss," *The New York Times*, October 26, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/26/opinion/26dowd.html?_r=0.

²⁸ Rainbow Murray, "Introduction and Framework," In *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, ed. Rainbow Murray (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 1-29.

journalists are more concerned with appealing to the masses with an entertaining story then protecting, defending, and properly representing fellow women.

Even the articles that were not describing Palin as a sex symbol were focused on her sex. As DeNeen Brown, another female columnist like Maureen Dowd, commented,

We watch the polls while examining her stockings. We listen to her speech while calculating how many bobby pins hold up her hairdo. We parse her record while commenting on the shade of her lipstick. We measure our child-rearing skills against hers. She's a hockey mom. We are soccer (or swimming or softball) moms. We can give a pretty good PTA pep talk, and nobody asked us to be vice president. But there is another component to the conversation. Palin has burst onto the political scene from a state far away, geographically and culturally. Suddenly she has become the symbol of Everywoman, the working mother who broke the glass ceiling that so many women have tossed stones at. Standing on their shoulders, she has emerged on the other side...On some level, we despise ourselves for judging the first GOP vice presidential nominee among us. On another, we feel entitled to scrutinize her choices because she would like to dictate many of ours.²⁹

Here lies another example of a female journalist commenting solely on the sex of the candidate, identifying her bias, yet allowing it to dictate her reporting anyway. While this piece does not actually objectify Palin blatantly, it does, interestingly, display much of the bias women had against Palin during her campaign for Vice President.

The articles continuously referencing Palin as “Barbie,” “hot,” or “sexy” and other objectifying titles were endless during the primary of 2008. *Time Magazine*, often considered a formidable and reliable source for news and information, published an article about Palin as a sex symbol. Bill Tancer wrote an article in September 2008 titled, “Searching for Sarah Palin’s ‘Hot Photos’”. The article begins:

²⁹ DeNeen L. Brown, "Who Do We Think She Is?", *The Washington Post*, September 12, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/11/AR2008091103630.html>.

I doubt that any of us have ever considered any of our past vice-presidential candidates a sex symbol...if you look more carefully at the 1300 searches Hitwise tracked, one of the most commonly entered search topics surrounding Palin was 'hot photos.' Other queries common to the American public: 'Sarah Palin Bikini Photos,' 'Sarah Palin Naked,' 'Sarah Palin Nude.' People also searched frequently for Palin's physical stats—particularly her age and height—as they did with the other candidates and running mates.³⁰

Tancer's reporting draws no attention to Palin's qualifications for office, her stance on any issue of substance or importance during the 2008 elections, or any reference to her time as Governor. He instead draws attention to the sex appeal of the Vice Presidential candidate and gives recognition to the many people focused on Palin's appearance rather than her qualifications. Readers often consider *Time Magazine* to be one of the more reliable sources for well-researched news and information, but Tancer instead highlights how often Sarah Palin is searched for on the Internet and how often various references to her appearance come up in searches. This article was written and published within the first few days of her announcement as the Vice Presidential candidate. This article fails to inform the reader about the candidate in a substantive way, instead objectifying her and paying undue attention to her physical attributes. Tancer's piece also gives an indication of how the public immediately perceived Palin just a few days after McCain's announcement of his running mate. The fact that so many of the public were more concerned with finding hot photos of her or knowing her physical measurements shows that the media was not doing its part to inform the viewers and the citizens about the important facts related to the candidate.

³⁰ Bill Tancer, "Searching for Sarah Palin's 'Hot Photos,'" *Time Magazine*, September 2, 2008, <http://content.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1838041,00.html>.

In addition to the media commentary being biased and focused on the wrong issues related to Palin, it was often harsh and unkind. JoAnn Wypijewski of *The Nation* wrote:

A man fiddling with his wedding ring in the presence of another woman usually has something on his mind. At his introduction of Sarah Palin to the world on August 29, John McCain appeared a man possessed, playing with his ring, fastening his gaze on her breasts, her backside, his right fingers sliding up from that dratted gold band to the finger tip, pinching it as if to control the volcano stirring within him...Here was McCain, the angry old warrior, deploying sex as a central political weapon to recharge his potency, his party's fortunes and the cultural oomph of the right. Not gender. The Republicans didn't need just any woman to compete with Obama for the Wow factor, the Mmm factor, the stable, loving family factor. It is a calculated bonus that adherents can now speak loftily of making history, but for different reasons, drawing deep from the well of their identities, and not for the first time, both McCain and the right needed a sexual icon.³¹

In addition to not representing the candidates in a manner that focuses on the news of the election and their candidacies, the writer provides no useful information to the citizens who are looking for the necessary facts to make an informed opinion on the candidates and the election. This is yet another illustration of a female journalist doing little to properly portray a fellow female. Additionally, it is just poor reporting that does little to help the overall discussion taking place in 2008, especially at a time when monumental things were happening in the United States economy and abroad.

³¹ JoAnn Wypijewski, "Beauty and the Beast," *The Nation*, September 29, 2008, <http://www.thenation.com/article/beauty-and-beast#>.

While the media focused heavily on the appearance of Sarah Palin, her male counterpart on the Democratic ticket, Vice Presidential candidate Joe Biden, was apt to point it out as well and CNN reported on it, recounting that:

Joe Biden says there are obvious differences between himself and fellow vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, but they're not just on policy. She's good looking. 'There's a gigantic difference between John McCain and Barack Obama and between me and I suspect my vice presidential opponent,' Biden said at an outdoor rally Sunday, getting ready to hit the GOP ticket for their economic policies. 'She's good-looking,' he quipped.³²

While it is potentially harmful for the media to objectify female candidates, it simply reinforces stereotypes for the candidates to do it as well. If the public cannot count on the media to display the candidates' qualifications accurately and in an unbiased manner, citizens certainly expect those nominated to elected office to do so.

Governor Palin was only the second woman to be nominated to a major party ticket as Vice President, following in the footsteps of Democrat, Representative Geraldine Ferraro, in 1984. In a quick review of the research on and media coverage of her historical nomination almost twenty five years before Governor Palin's, it is evidenced that media coverage has not made great strides, in terms of gender bias, in that span of time. In remembering that significant time, *Newsweek* reporter, Julia Baird recalled,

When Walter Mondale chose New York Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate in 1984, he set off the briefest of crazes. The sheer newness of the first female vice presidential candidate for a major party delighted the media and—initially—the public. She drew

³² Alexander Marquardt, "Biden: Palin's Good-Looking," *CNN Political Ticker*, August 31, 2008, <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2008/08/31/biden-palins-good-looking/>.

large crowds wherever she went; schoolgirls were brought along to witness her speeches. Her supporters chanted, "Run with a woman, win with a woman." Much of the media response was predictable—she was described as "feisty" and "pushy but not threatening," and was asked if she knew how to bake blueberry muffins. She was also questioned, in a debate with Vice President George H.W. Bush, about whether the "Soviets might be tempted to take advantage of you simply because you are a woman." When she stood before the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, anchor Tom Brokaw announced: "Geraldine Ferraro ... The first woman to be nominated for vice president ... Size 6!"³³

What can be seen in this summary is simple. Gender bias of the two most major female candidates nominated to their party's Vice Presidential ticket was similar across a twenty-five year time span. Focus on the femininity, or lack thereof, and the physical appearance of a candidate, both in 1984 and 2008 was quite similar and shows that this coverage was in no way particular to Palin or Republican women in general, but instead, women spanning across political parties and points in time.

By focusing so intently on the physical appearance of Palin, and any female candidate for that matter, the more important information necessary for the voters to make informed decisions become limited. In the case of Palin, it likely impeded on the likelihood of her and John McCain being elected to the Executive Office. While the current research shows that media bias does in fact play a role in swaying voter opinion and decision, it seems extremely hard to identify or quantify just how detrimental such media bias has been and will continue to be. What is evident, however, is just how powerful the media's many remarks and comments made can be. It does not take any research to see how such commentary is not only offensive to female candidates like Palin, but also disadvantageous to a campaign overall.

³³ Julia Baird "Sarah Palin and Women Voters," *Newsweek*, 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/sarah-palin-and-women-voters-88503>.

Conclusions

One notable factor in the inability of women to break the political glass ceiling is the influence of today's media. Media in the 21st century is a strong entity due to the 24-hour news cycle. In addition, there are many new social media outlets, which only provide voters with more access to news and information at rapid succession. Media's representation of female politicians is lackluster at best and has been shown to be a factor in their inability to surpass the political glass ceiling.³⁴ Although women, such as Sarah Palin, continue to put cracks in the political glass ceiling, the progress is entirely too slow. There are gaping inequalities that still exist despite much public opinion that says men and women are socially seen to be on an "equal playing field." While it is quite clear that women are not adequately represented in political leadership, especially in the Executive Office, the reasons why are expansive and there are differing opinions to the severity of these problems.

In addition to the problem of media bias, another apparent way female candidates are misrepresented is through stereotyping. A study on female politicians conducted by interviewing their press secretaries found that little had changed regarding media coverage over the course of these politicians' careers. For example, Elizabeth Holtzman, a former Representative from New York, experienced the same level of damaging stereotypes over the 20 years she was a member.³⁵ Some of the stereotypes most often portrayed in the media include those I have identified here with 2008 Republican Vice

³⁴ Carlin, and Winfrey, "Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage;" Niven and Zilber, "How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress?"

³⁵ Niven and Zilber, "How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress?"

Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin. The “sex object” stereotypes, focusing primarily on clothing and physical appearance and “the mother stereotype,” which I call here the “mommy problem,” identifies female candidates as unable to provide adequate leadership because of femininity and maternal responsibilities.³⁶ These types of stereotypes are a serious challenge for female candidates because stereotypes have a tendency to dictate the roles people are expected to fulfill.³⁷ As evidenced here, media’s influence in promoting these stereotypes is undeniable. It is not only unacceptable and detrimental that these stereotypes exist, but it is also problematic that the media hold power and influence over their viewers and readers and persist in utilizing such stereotypes.

What is not often noted in research on the political glass ceiling is the role American society and culture, fueled by the media, play in stimulating such stereotypes. In American culture, politics are considered to be a predominantly masculine field.³⁸ Voters and the media both appear to see politics as a masculine arena; this is a possible explanation for why reactions to female politicians are often negative and fraught with stereotyping and biased behavior. This reality hinders the ability of elections to be fair and unbiased platforms for women to present themselves as possible candidates for elected office. Moreover, it negatively influences the ability for the United States to have a more balanced, in terms of gender, platform of power. It is important for candidates and

³⁶ Carlin, and Winfrey, “Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage;” Niven and Zilber, “How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress?”

³⁷ Meeks, “Is She ‘Man Enough’? Women Candidates, Executive Political Offices and News Coverage.”

³⁸ Farida Jalazai, “Women Candidates and the Media: 1992-2000 Elections,” *Politics & Policy* 34, 3 (2006): 606-633.

voters alike to identify these societal norms that potentially influence media's decision to represent female political candidates and politicians in this manner.

2

Hillary Clinton:

*Breaking through Stereotypes to Crack the Highest
Glass Ceiling*

“When I was asked what it means to be a woman running for president, I always gave the same answer: that I was proud to be running as a woman but I was running because I thought I’d be the best President. But I am a woman, and like millions of women, I know there are still barriers and biases out there, often unconscious... Although we weren’t able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it’s got about 18 million cracks in it. And the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time. That has always been the history of progress in America.” –Hillary Clinton ³⁹

In the 2008 election cycle, Senator Hillary Clinton was favored to be the head of the Democratic ticket in the general election, partially because she was generally the most well-known and well-respected woman to ever run. She, unlike Sarah Palin, the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate and the only other woman in the election, was a well-known politician running for President. Much like Sarah Palin, Clinton faced considerable scrutiny as one of the first women to be seriously considered for the Oval Office. Print and news media geared a great deal of their attention towards Clinton’s gender and objectified her as a woman as opposed to focusing on her qualifications for the position.

Hillary Clinton has been a member of the political arena for many years – a Watergate committee attorney, an Arkansas Governor’s wife, a First Lady and wife of a two-term Democratic President, a Jr. Senator from New York, and then Secretary of State. Clinton faced a great deal of scrutiny, as many in her various positions, not to mention all First Ladies, do and yet she attempted to be a powerful player in her husband’s administration despite the serious scrutiny following his personal indiscretions. She has faced no small amount of media scrutiny in all of these positions, especially as First Lady of the United States and when running for President, it appeared she was

³⁹ Hillary Clinton, “Concession speech,” June, 7, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jun/07/hillaryclinton.uselections20081>.

clearly aware of the media scrutiny a person faces in a position of power, as she expressed numerous times. Specifically, she has faced an entire political career naturally filled with media attention on her personal life and her personal choices, right down to her suit and hair choices and her husband's indiscretions. Over time, she appears to have made the conscious effort to ignore this unwanted attention as much as possible, or at least brush it off.

In fact, she recently discussed these challenges in an interview with *Glamour* magazine, a popularly read fashion magazine amongst the young adult generation. She remarked, "... for young women who are interested in running for office, you just have to decide you're going to follow Eleanor Roosevelt's maxim about growing skin as thick as the hide of a rhinoceros, and you have to be incredibly well-prepared—better prepared [than a man], actually—and you have to figure out how you're going to present yourself..."⁴⁰ During her campaign, she alluded to the specific challenges that she as a woman faced when running for President and that women as a whole still faced in career advancement. During a speech at Wellesley College, her alma mater, she commented,

In so many ways, this all women's college prepared me to compete on the all boys' club of presidential politics...I know that politics can be frustrating, but it seems like we get bogged down in distractions and trivialization, who's up and who's down, people's hairstyle or their laugh or what they're wearing rather than what they're saying. But in those moments when you think you're never going to break through the noise and you just want to give up, I urge you to think about all of the people who came before you. Many of them, we'll never know their names. They're lost to history. But so many others, we can read their stories, be amazed at their strength and their courage.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Cindi Leive, "Career Advice From Hillary Rodham Clinton: 'You Don't Have To Be Perfect. Most Men Never Think Like That,'" *Glamour Magazine*, 2014, <http://www.glamour.com/inspired/2014/08/hillary-rodham-clinton-career-lessons>.

⁴¹ Hillary Clinton, "Remarks On Student Activism At Wellesley College," November 1, 2007, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=77072>.

However, even the thickest skin or the greatest amount of courage may not be enough to overcome the challenges female candidates face from print and news media.

What became evident with Clinton's run for President in 2008 was that the analysis and special attention she had received for a good portion of her life would continue, and the scrutiny would actually intensify. It would, in fact, increase to the point where the media coverage would be potentially harmful to her chances of winning the Democratic nomination, as well as the Presidency, and certainly affect her ability to talk about important political matters. In a piece in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, research showed that Clinton was considered the most viable candidate on the Democratic ticket in October of 2007.⁴² Much of the media attention did have to do with the fact that she was a strong candidate for President, and therefore, she received a great deal of attention. She was already well-known across both parties and considered a substantial political candidate who could, in fact, run the country.

The media's undue attention to Hillary Clinton, particularly regarding her continuous portrayal as an "aggressive woman," took the general public's attention away from the true point of a primary election – determining the best and most viable candidate to move forward to the general election based on their politics, not their gender. How the media focused a great deal of attention on her gender will be described further below. While there is no question that she is a woman and that is noteworthy in a time when the country has never seen a female President or Vice President, it should not be the focus of an election, as the sex of the President is not key to their ability to be an effective leader.

⁴² Loren Collingwood, Matt Barreto, and Todd Donovan, "Early Primaries, Viability and Changing Preferences For Presidential Candidates," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 42, 2 (June 2012): 231-255.

This is important to look at thoroughly because research shows that media criticism and stereotyping can hinder women's abilities to enter an election in the first place. One of the few ways to eventually overcome this issue is to educate journalists and politicians, calling attention to biases and stereotypes that exist in the coverage of female candidates.⁴³ *Political Parity*, an organization focused on promoting parity between men and women in government and Congress, notes, "The race for the presidency garners the most public attention and the most media coverage. As a particularly 'masculine' office, the presidency has proven to be a glass ceiling for women candidates. Unfortunately, coverage of female presidential candidates has usually reflected and reproduced the cultural idea that the president should be male."⁴⁴ This chapter aims to look at the specific ways in which the media scrutinized a prominent female Presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, through bias and common female stereotypes. It will also note how this scrutiny drew attention away from the candidate's ability to be President, providing a better understanding and awareness of how this issue directly affects female candidates negatively.

The Iron Maiden

Political pundits on both sides of the aisle consider the Clintons, Hillary and her husband, former President Bill Clinton, to be one of the most well-known and influential political couples of their time. Their names are instantly recognized even by those who are not involved in politics. This was largely considered to be to the advantage of then Senator Clinton as she entered the Presidential election field in 2007. This was unlike

⁴³ "Media Coverage of Women Candidates," *Political Parity*, last modified 2014, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://www.politicalparity.org/research-inventory/media-coverage-of-women-candidates/>.

⁴⁴ "Media Coverage of Women Candidates," *Political Parity*.

Sarah Palin, who was running on the Vice Presidential Republican ticket, someone completely unknown in the political arena. Clinton, however, immediately began to face challenges, as she had never been considered to be the warmest of political figures. She had a well-established reputation as having an unwelcoming personality. Through her years as a First Lady and a Senator, she had often been considered to be lacking a certain level of warmth in her personality. As academic research on women running in campaigns has shown, this lack of warmth is often a detriment to female candidates, as they are expected, generally speaking, to be warm, caring, and giving creatures. This attention towards her demeanor only intensified once she was a candidate for the highest office of the land.

Dianne Bystrom, Director of the Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics at Iowa State University and a commentator on women in politics within the academic community, carefully analyzed survey results regarding preferred Presidential traits and issue expertise. She determined,

...evidence of voters' perceptions of Clinton's qualifications as president on typical 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits and issues can be seen in a January 2007 Gallup poll of Democratic and Democratic-leaning independents and a November 2007 Iowa poll of likely Democratic caucus-goers. According to the Gallup poll, Clinton was widely perceived by Democrats as 'having what it takes to do the job of president,' with her greatest strength that she was perceived as 'the most qualified to be president' by 61 percent of the respondents compared to 13 percent who said Obama was the most qualified. Strong majorities of respondents also perceived Clinton as the strongest leader (59%), best in a crisis (54%), and would manage government effectively (53%)—all "masculine" traits.... Obama was chosen as the most likeable candidate by 41 percent of the respondents compared to 31 percent who said Clinton was the most likeable... Similarly, respondents to the November 2007 Iowa poll rated Clinton the top... on such 'masculine traits' as the most knowledgeable

about the world (37%), most presidential (27%), and most fiscally responsible (23%).⁴⁵

What is evident from this analysis is that Clinton was seen as a strong and viable candidate who understood the issues the country faced and was considered someone who could adequately handle the role of President of the United States of America. The survey results also show that while Clinton was capable of handling the role of President, many survey respondents considered her in “masculine” terms, even over unknown Barack Obama who ran against her and eventually won the party nomination. As evidenced through many different news sources, TV, newspapers and magazines alike, media played an instrumental role in perpetuating this stereotype of Hillary Clinton by describing her as a masculine being. While this did not necessarily lead to her demise in the election, it is worth analyzing and addressing for the sake of looking at ways for candidates and members of the media to promote equity in campaign coverage of male and female candidates.

This phenomena was not only evidenced by Democrats supporting Clinton or feminists focused on making an example out of Clinton, but also by well-trusted and sound academics in women’s politics. Bystrom herself contends that immediately upon Clinton announcing her exploratory committee, scholars were able to see that:

Clinton’s media coverage was different—and notably, more negative- than her male opponents... Although Clinton did not lack in the quantity of coverage she received... the quality of her coverage was damaged by gendered frames that focused on her campaign strategies,

⁴⁵ 4. Dianne G. Bystrom, “18 Million Cracks in the Glass Ceiling: The Rise and Fall Of Hillary Rodham Clinton’s Campaign For The Democratic Nomination For President,” In *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, ed. Rainbow Murray (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 69-91.

rather than issue emphasis, and attention to her physical appearance and personality, often in a sexist or sexualized way.⁴⁶

In looking at media coverage of female candidates such as Hillary Clinton, the language used to portray them is a clear-cut sign of how biased or objectifying the piece may be. While this coverage alone does not necessarily lead to a candidate losing an election, it is crucial in the sense that media, print and television alike, must understand that the quality of their coverage can affect the quality of the elections and the discussion of the important issues at hand during an election.

Along these lines, media critic Ashleigh Crowther closely analyzed the language the media used in portraying Clinton leading up to the election and determined that the most common terms used were “overly ambitious,” “calculating,” “cold,” “scary,” and “intimidating.”⁴⁷ Carlin and Winfrey note,

Portrayals of Hillary Clinton as weak or needing a man to carry her campaign were relatively rare. The common media frame for Clinton was that she was not feminine enough... The overt sexism resulted in frequent vulgar overtones... *MSNBC*'s Tucker Carlson who commented that ‘When she comes on television, I involuntarily cross my legs’ and by Chris Matthews who called her male supporters ‘castratos in the eunuch chorus’⁴⁸

The crude remarks that came along with presenting Clinton in these masculine terms took the attention away from why she was even being discussed in the first place and effectively takes the serious nature out of the coverage of her as a candidate.

⁴⁶ 4. Bystrom, “18 Million Cracks in the Glass Ceiling: The Rise and Fall Of Hillary Rodham Clinton’s Campaign For The Democratic Nomination For President.”

⁴⁷ Ashleigh Crowther, “Sexist Language in Media Coverage of Hillary Clinton.” *Media Crit*, <http://mediacrit.wikifoundry.com/page/Sexist+Language+in+Media+Coverage+of+Hillary+Clinton>.

⁴⁸ Carlin and Winfrey, “Have you come a long way, baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and sexism in 2008 campaign coverage.”

Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton were the butt of jokes in print and news media; however, while Sarah Palin had to work harder to be taken seriously by the media, Hillary Clinton had the opposite problem. The media perceived her as being too serious, too uptight, especially for a woman. This is problematic because the discussion is focused on her personality, which is certainly a factor when considering a Presidential candidate, but not how her personality may affect her ability to lead. If the conversation is not being directed toward her policies and positions, then a disservice is being done to the nation, a nation in need of education on the issues and candidates through various news sources.

This was in no way a new problem for Clinton. As early as 1992, the media had begun targeting her as unfeminine, hard and calculated. At that time, *Washington Post* writer Donnie Radcliffe noted, “It hasn’t been easy being the Woman in this year of the Woman, everybody’s favorite target for all that’s dangerous about being independent, smart, impatient, articulate, outspoken, ambitious—and while she’s at it, a three-fer: wife, mother and successful corporate lawyer. By any standard, Hillary Clinton has been a handful to deal with.”⁴⁹ Granted, this was written long before she was a candidate for political office on her own. However, it is worth noting that she was already receiving some bias in her media coverage in that she was being criticized for having traits, such as “smart” and “impatient” that might not be critical if used to describe others.

Fast forward over a decade and not much had changed. Hillary Clinton was better known than before and the media was bigger and more powerful than before, yet women

⁴⁹ Donnie Radcliffe, “Hillary Clinton and the Laws Of The Campaign; No Longer A Liability, She's Making A Quieter Case,” *The Washington Post*, October 30, 1992, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/307539381.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Oct+30%2C+1992&author=Radcliffe%2C+Donnie&pub=The+Washington+Post+%28pre-1997+Fulltext%29&edition=&startpage=&desc=Hillary+Clinton+and+the+Laws+of+the+Campai gn%3B+No+Longer+a+Liability%2C+She%27s+Making+a+Quieter+Case>.

still faced harsh and irrelevant criticisms in the media. In a 2006 *Washington Post* article, columnist Joel Achenbach predicted Clinton's likelihood of running for President. He wrote, "...the person everyone's talking about right now is Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, who has \$20 million in the bank, the great brand name and the iron will to crush every Russ Feingold who might stand in her way. She's running. You can tell by the hair, which has finally stopped changing styles, every strand frozen in place, as though she's ready to be on a coin."⁵⁰ There are a few things that are immediately evident and concerning from this comment. Firstly, Achenbach addresses Clinton's "iron will" and seems to mean it in a most positive way; however, it does nothing to further Clinton's image, nor does it provide any information that is all that necessary to the consumer of this article in terms of formulating an opinion on her. It makes her sound harsh, scary, and overly determined.

Gender and politics academic Lindsey Meeks notes,

The disconnect in America between women and political office is fed by the cultural premise that politics is a domain for masculinized behaviors, messages, and professional experiences—creating a masculine stereotype for politicians... but, stereotypes become problematic when they dictate the roles people are expected to fulfill. For example, stereotypes of masculinity and femininity suggest gender-specific rules and identities in society.⁵¹

When the media uses language like "iron will," it places the undue and possibly ill-fitting "iron maiden" stereotype on Clinton. Women do not necessarily need to be covered with a different vocabulary than their male counterparts if some level of parity exists, but it is important for journalists to notice and try to avoid any bias that may come across through their choice of words. For instance, "iron maiden" is not language that would often be

⁵⁰ Joel Achenbach, "She's No Lady," *The Washington Post*, June 4, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/30/AR2006053001019.html>.

⁵¹ Meeks, "Is She 'Man Enough'? Women Candidates, Executive Political Offices, and News Coverage."

used to describe a male, but implies that a woman is too masculine to be a woman or feminine.

Maragret Thatcher, the first female Prime Minister of Great Britain, was the “original” “iron lady”, as she was considered strong in her convictions and difficult to like. While Thatcher has a reputation as one of the strongest, most powerfully conservative Prime Minister’s in Great Britain’s history, but she was not necessarily well liked. Based on this long-standing attribution, describing female candidates with similar language does not have a positive association. As Meeks asserts, masculine and feminine descriptions of candidates insinuate certain behavioral expectations that are not fair to place on people, male or female.

Meeks contends these types of masculine and feminine stereotypes in politics are dangerous and can force politicians into filling roles that they wouldn’t necessarily fill otherwise. It also provides those reading such media to unduly place female candidates in roles they have no intention of otherwise filling. Should the candidate, in this case Clinton, want to portray herself this way, it is her right. However, the problem arises when the media fits her into a predetermined stereotype that she herself or the public in general, may not include her.

Carlin and Winfrey discuss the “iron maiden” issue further. They note, “The iron maiden image can result in loss of the advantages women candidates may have. Women who exhibit too many masculine traits are often ridiculed and lose trust because they are going against type or play into male political stereotypes that voters are rejecting.”⁵²

⁵² Carlin and Winfrey, “Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage.”

Political scientist and prolific writer on gender issues, Farida Jalazai also addresses this scenario in her literature,

While depicting women as more aggressive could be beneficial because it challenges traditional notions of weakness, findings suggest the opposite: aggressive speech is perceived negatively by the public. Coupled with the finding that journalists use more highly charged language when reporting on the speech of women candidates, the implication of this is clear: it makes it more difficult for women to appeal to voters.⁵³

Achenbach's article is one small instance in which this type of language was used, before Clinton was even a nominee. Nonetheless, it is a perfect example of the use of the "aggressive speech" Jalazai references. There are plenty of ways Achenbach could have referred to Clinton's intentions to knock everyone else out of the race without using a negative tone or aggressive speech. He likely could have still effectively made his point without using a common stereotype and bias to depict Clinton.

In fact, Achenbach's fellow *Washington Post* columnist, Beth Fouhy commentated on Clinton's running for President not long after in a different manner. She wrote, "Democratic Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton launched a trailblazing campaign for the White House on Saturday, a former first lady turned political powerhouse intent on becoming the first female president."⁵⁴ Fouhy, without making any comments or using any language that exudes masculinity, expresses a similar notion to that of Achenbach's, proving that it is possible to report on the candidates without using aggressive or negative speech which may incline the reader to think of the candidate in a particular manner.

⁵³ Jalazai, "Women Candidates and the Media: 1992-2000 Elections."

⁵⁴ Beth Fouhy, "Hillary Clinton 'In to Win' White House," *The Washington Post*, January 2, 200, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/20/AR2007012000444.html>.

Clinton herself played into this stereotype by not presenting herself as warm and welcoming, as many would have expected of a female or any male candidate. She did much more to make herself appear as a strong, iron-willed candidate. This, of course, may be her natural personality, which she has every right to express however she sees fit, but it does not need to be exacerbated by aggressive speech within the media. She received no support from the media in regards to overhyping this trait. Carlin and Winfrey note,

No one, however, doubted Hillary Clinton's desire to appear powerful and that resulted in negative representations of her feminine side. Clinton was the antiseductress who reminded men of the affair gone bad and was 'likened by national Public Radio's political editor, Ken Rudin, to the demoniac, knife-wielding stalker played by Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*.⁵⁵

Hillary Clinton was called a number of other names that also brought into question her sanity and her lack of welcoming behavior.

For example, *New York Times* op-ed columnist, Maureen Dowd, who has covered news extensively and is well-known for her pieces in *Time*, and *The New York Times*, who also won a Pulitzer Prize for her columns on President Clinton's indiscretions with Monica Lewinsky, said when referring to Hillary Clinton,

After saying she found her "voice" in New Hampshire, she has turned into Sybil. We've had Experienced Hillary, Soft Hillary, Hard Hillary, Misty Hillary, Sarcastic Hillary, Joined-at-the-Hip-to-Bill Hillary, Her-Own-Person-Who-Just-Happens-to-Be-Married-to-a-Former-President Hillary, It's-My-Turn Hillary, Cuddly Hillary, Let's-Get-Down-in-the-Dirt-and-Fight-Like-Dogs Hillary.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Carlin and Winfrey, "Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage."

⁵⁶ Maureen Dowd, "Begrudging His Bedazzling," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/27/opinion/27dowd.html>.

While this was written by an op-ed columnist and does not necessarily carry the same weight as one of the political columnists at *The New York Times*, it is simply a distinction without a difference and still worth noting the highly charged language that is used to describe someone who was once a First Lady, a Senator and was running for President. Dowd's pieces set a tone. It was written by a well-known news columnist and a woman at that – an example of the many times when women reporters stereotype female candidates. It is also worth noting that this was picked up by many other newspapers and CNBC, becoming a somewhat large story during the election. So much so that CNBC host Lawrence Kudlow wrote: "Now I'm no psychiatrist, far from it, but I think a simple answer is that Senator Clinton could be depressed."⁵⁷ While this particular op-ed may not have been widely read, it is worth noting the almost visceral language used by a *New York Times* columnist to describe a Presidential candidate. Such language undermines the importance of the candidate and belittles her. While this is an op-ed piece not focused on providing actual news, it still has the power and ability to influence the way in which the public perceives the subject, especially if the mainstream media picks up on it and carries it further.

Not only was the media and the public honed in on Hillary Clinton's aggressive nature, the media often poked fun at many of her personality traits, thus diminishing the importance of the mission she was on to become President. On September 30, 2007, the *New York Times* alone posted three separate pieces focused on or at least mentioning Clinton's laugh, evoking negative and somewhat hateful stereotypes regarding women. In

⁵⁷ Sarah Pavlus, "Media Diagnose Hillary 'Sybil' Clinton With 'Mood Swings,' Depression, And 'Multiple Personality Disorder,'" *Media Matters for America*, February 27, 2008, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2008/02/27/media-diagnose-hillary-sybil-clinton-with-mood/142703>.

the Politics section of the *New York Times*, Patrick Healy wrote an article completely devoted to Clinton's laugh. He wrote,

Stepping offstage, she took questions from reporters, and found herself being grilled about whether she was moderating her own pro-choice position. And suddenly it happened: Mrs. Clinton let loose a hearty belly laugh that lasted a few seconds. Reporters glanced at one another as if they had missed the joke. But nothing particularly funny had occurred; it was, instead, a deployment of the Clinton Cackle. At that moment, the laugh seemed like the equivalent of an eye-roll — she felt she was being nitpicked, so she shamed her inquisitors by chuckling at them (or their queries). But friends of hers told a different story: She has this fantastic sense of humor, you see, but it's too sarcastic to share with the general public because not everyone likes sarcasm.... The reality is, Mrs. Clinton is the leading candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination right now, and the commensurate political attacks and criticism are coming at her from all sides. She needs ways to respond without appearing defensive or brittle, her advisers say.⁵⁸

Healy does at least note that she faces a great deal of political attacks and criticism, although if asked, he might not presume his is included. He, much like other pundits, points out how she often appears “defensive or brittle,” again pinpointing personality traits that are not connected to her qualifications for the White House. Healy had an opportunity to discuss Clinton's stance on abortion rights, since that was the subject of the speech she was giving prior to laughing with reporters. This was an opportunity to portray an issue and a candidate's perspective that were both important to the 2008 election; but instead, he chose to write an entire article on what was behind her laugh. This belittles the candidate's attempt to discuss an important policy issue, wastes a keen opportunity to write an insightful piece about an important election topic, and denies the general public the right to also learn her stance on what could be a key issue for them.

⁵⁸ Patrick Healy, “The Clinton Conundrum: What's Behind the Laugh,” *The New York Times*, September 30, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/us/politics/30clinton.html>.

The second and third time Clinton's laugh was referenced on the same day were by two of the *New York Times* op-ed columnists, Frank Rich and Maureen Dowd. Frank Rich wrote, "Then there was that laugh. The Clinton campaign's method for heeding the perennial complaints that its candidate comes across as too calculating and controlled is to periodically toss in a smidgen of what it deems personality. But these touches of intimacy seem even more calculating."⁵⁹ Maureen Dowd wrote, "That's why Hillary is laughing a lot now, big belly laughs, in response to tough questions or comments, to soften her image as she confidently knocks her male opponents out of the way. From nag to wag."⁶⁰ While both of these comments were made by op-ed columnists, they are influential and well-read throughout the United States and establish parameters for what is considered acceptable to say and think.

Bystrom found that on the following day, ABC's *Good Morning America*, CNN's *Situation Room*, Fox News' *Hannity & Colmes*, and MSNBC's *Hardball* all mentioned stories about Clinton's laugh.⁶¹ Three columns, two of which were written by columnists who are not generally tasked with reporting on news or politics, but just to express their opinions, made something that should have never been a story. It made Hillary Clinton sound like a witch, and it became a national story that all the major news programs were reporting on, thus deterring attention from the important political issues that they should have been addressing.

⁵⁹ Frank Rich, "Is Hillary Clinton The New Old Al Gore?", *The New York Times*, September 30, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/opinion/30rich.html?_r=0.

⁶⁰ Maureen Dowd, "The Nepotism Tango," *The New York Times*, September 30, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/opinion/30dowd.html>.

⁶¹ 4. Bystrom, "18 Million Cracks in the Glass Ceiling: The Rise and Fall of Hillary Rodham Clinton's Campaign For The Democratic Nomination For President."

Associate Editor and Pulitzer Prize winner, Joan Vennochi of *Boston Globe* wrote on what quickly became the media's obsession with Clinton's laugh. She remarked,

HENS CACKLE. So do witches. And, so does the front-runner in the Democratic presidential contest. Former Bill Clinton adviser Dick Morris recently described Hillary Clinton's laugh as 'loud, inappropriate, and mirthless...A scary sound that was somewhere between a cackle and a screech...Any woman who has ever been the only female in the room knows the guys are always waiting for the perfect moment- the one that makes the woman look silly, stupid, weepy or best of all, witchy. ⁶²

Even when coming to her defense, Vennochi draws additional attention to the issue and extends the unnecessary story out even longer. She does make good points about how the mundane focus on Clinton's laugh appears targeted, as if her counterparts are waiting for her to have some kind of emotional breakdown. However, her article becomes just another one where a columnist from a major newspaper is more focused on Clinton's laugh than her politics.

As evidenced by sampling news articles from a number of well-known newspaper writers and supported by well-respected academic research, Hillary Clinton received a great deal of news media attention that drew attention away from her candidacy for President. These are just a few examples of moments during the campaign when unnecessary and unhelpful stereotyping overtook the conversation. Instead of discussing Clinton's ability to be President and where she stood on the important policy issues facing the country at the time, attention was drawn away from these important issues and towards her unwelcoming personality and her witch-like laugh.

⁶² Joan Vennochi, "The Clinton Cackle," *The Boston Globe*, September 30, 2007, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2007/09/30/that_clinton_cackle/.

Sexualizing Hillary Clinton

While much was said in the 2008 elections about the “sexual being” that was Sarah Palin, Hillary Clinton faced sexualization quite differently from that of Palin. Carlin and Winfrey note, “Nowhere was the contrast between Sarah Palin’s and Hillary Clinton’s coverage greater than in the category of sex object, which both portrayals sidestepping qualifications. Palin’s attractiveness resulted in frequent and varied references to her ‘sexiness’; whereas, Clinton was viewed as not feminine enough in pantsuits that covered her ‘cankles’ (thick ankles).”⁶³ This is an interesting and important distinction to note. Both female candidates in the 2008 election faced a multitude of media coverage focused on their sexualization, both in positive and negative terms so to speak, and they both faced media scrutiny directly related to them being female. This is something their male counterparts rarely, if at all, ever faced.

The Pew Research Journalism Project discerned that then Senator Obama received generally positive coverage. They note, “Democrat Barack Obama, the junior Senator from Illinois, enjoyed by far the most positive treatment of the major candidates during the first five months of the year...”⁶⁴ While this particular comment does not necessarily address the negative coverage which Obama also received, it does point out that he received a great deal more positive coverage than his female counterpart. In fact, CBS reporter Thalia Assuras referred to him as a “media darling.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Carlin and Winfrey, “Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage.”

⁶⁴ “The Invisible Primary- Invisible No Longer,” Pew Research Center Journalism Project. 2007. Last modified October 29, 2007, <http://www.journalism.org/2007/10/29/the-invisible-primaryinvisible-no-longer/>.

⁶⁵ John Wilson, “The Myth of Pro-Obama Media Bias,” *FAIR: Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting*, September 15, 2008, <http://fair.org/extra-online-articles/the-myth-of-pro-obama-media-bias/>

While Obama faced what some journalists called the “pro-Obama media bias,” Clinton did not have such luck with the mainstream media.⁶⁶ *New York Times Magazine* News and Politics features writer, Amanda Fortini, wrote a piece in April of 2008, the height of the 2008 Primary election season, arguing that Hillary Clinton had caused a Feminist Reawakening. She comes to Clinton’s defense and points out some of the sexual objectification Clinton faced. She acknowledges,

...Hillary Clinton declared her candidacy, and the sexism in America, long lying dormant, like some feral, tranquilized animal, yawned and revealed itself. Even those of us who didn’t usually concern ourselves with gender-centric matters began to realize that when it comes to women, we are not post-everything...The egregious and by now familiar potshots are too numerous (and tiresome) to recount. A greatest-hits selection provides a measure of the misogyny: There’s Republican axman Roger Stone’s anti-Hillary 527 organization, Citizens United Not Timid, or CUNT. And the Facebook group Hillary Clinton: Stop Running for President and Make Me a Sandwich, which has 44,000-plus members. And the “Hillary Nutcracker” with its “stainless-steel thighs.” And Clinton’s Wikipedia page, which, according to *The New Republic*, is regularly vandalized with bathroom-stall slurs like “slut” and “cuntbag.” And the truly horrible YouTube video of a KFC bucket that reads HILLARY MEAL DEAL: 2 FAT THIGHS, 2 SMALL BREASTS, AND A BUNCH OF LEFT WINGS. And Rush Limbaugh worrying whether the country is ready to watch a woman age in the White House (as though nearly every male politician has not emerged portly, wearied, and a grandfatherly shade of gray). And those two boors who shouted, “Iron my shirts!” from the sidelines in New Hampshire. “Ah, the remnants of sexism,” Clinton replied, “alive and well.”⁶⁷

While this piece was not specifically objectifying Clinton, Fortini does a compelling job of summing up some of the awful and hateful things that were said, aired and written about Hillary Clinton during her candidacy.

⁶⁶ Wilson, “The Myth of Pro-Obama Media Bias.”

⁶⁷ Amanda Fortini, “The Feminist Reawakening,” *New York Magazine*, April 13, 2008, <http://nymag.com/news/features/46011/>.

While our focus is on media scrutiny of female candidates, it is crucial to note how the general public was seeing and perceiving the candidate, with or without the consumption of media. In this same time period, Obama was receiving different coverage. John Wilson of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, writing about the pro-Obama media bias reports,

Rush Limbaugh declared that the media were following Obama with “their tongues dragging along the concrete to the floors.” “Lenin, Stalin never got this kind of coverage from their media,” Limbaugh claimed... Joseph McQuaid, publisher of the conservative New Hampshire Union Leader, wrote an editorial headlined “Obama Orgy” that denounced “the outrageous imbalance in the major media’s coverage of the candidates”... the McCain campaign called media’s “bizarre fascination with Barack Obama. Some may even say it’s a love affair”... CBS Evening News anchor Katie Couric spoke of the “Obamathon . . . the non-stop coverage this week [that] has stolen most of the limelight from his opponent” and asked, “Will this summer of love last?”⁶⁸

Wilson’s reporting shows that Obama was receiving a great deal more positive coverage than the other candidates in the field, Republican and Democratic alike. Meanwhile, Fortini’s piece makes it quite clear that there are audiences everywhere who easily succumb to criticism and objectification of Hillary Clinton and likely, other female candidates. Setting aside the influence of media, her piece paints a picture as to what Clinton was up against, while Wilson’s shows a glimpse of what Obama was not.

Much of the media coverage of Clinton, while less blatant and offensive than the public’s ridicule which Fortini references, focused heavily on her appearance. In July of 2007, *Washington Post* fashion writer Robin Givhan criticized Hillary Clinton for showing more cleavage than usual or socially acceptable. She remarks,

⁶⁸ Wilson, “The Myth of Pro-Obama Media Bias.”

There was cleavage on display Wednesday afternoon on C-SPAN2. It belonged to Sen. Hillary Clinton... She was wearing a rose-colored blazer over a black top. The neckline sat low on her chest and had a subtle V-shape. The cleavage registered after only a quick glance... The last time Clinton wore anything that was remotely sexy in a public setting surely must have been more than a decade ago..."⁶⁹

While this was written by a fashion writer, who much like op-ed columnists are not gearing their writing in a political voice, Bystrom notes, "Other media outlets picked up the story, devoting substantial coverage to Clinton's cleavage as a campaign strategy. According to a report by Media Matters for America, MSNBC devoted almost 24 minutes to segments discussing Clinton's 'cleavage' between 9AM and 5PM on July 30th."⁷⁰ By MSNBC picking up a fashion writer's piece and discussing it on air multiple times during the day, it gives credibility to something that really did not deserve it and draws attention away from the political issues and back towards the personal. MSNBC, instead of covering Clinton's floor speech on the burdensome cost of higher education, chose to cover what she was wearing while giving that floor speech. Unfortunately, the fact that Clinton showed a little bit more cleavage than usual while on the Senate floor is not important when discerning whether she is a good and viable candidate for the Presidency, but this point is negated when print and television media focus on it intently.

Again, in December 2007, Robin Givhan turned her focus towards Clinton and another one of her commonly mentioned style attributes –pantsuits. On December 9, 2007, a story appeared in the Politics section of *The Washington Post* in the elections section. The *Post* had a special section set up for the elections where it listed each

⁶⁹ Robin Givhan, "Hillary Clinton's Tentative Dip into New Neckline Territory," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 2007,

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/07/19/AR2007071902668.html>.

⁷⁰ 4. Bystrom, "18 Million Cracks in the Glass Ceiling: The Rise and Fall of Hillary Rodham Clinton's Campaign For The Democratic Nomination For President."

candidate's name and had subheadings that included "candidates," "issues," and "polls." Under Clinton's section, a heading titled, "How She Looks" was also included. Upon further research, it appears there was no similar section listed under the other candidates' names. It is also worth noting that all the other candidates were males: Mitt Romney, John Edwards, Fred Thompson, John McCain, Barack Obama, Mike Huckabee, and Rudy Guiliani. While it should not matter what a candidate looks like, if there is going to be a section on appearances, there should be one for every candidate, both male and female.

Before even addressing Givhan's piece, it is worth noting that *The Washington Post* had such a section included in their election coverage and thought it was of political importance to include information about how Clinton looks, while excluding such a category from the information profiles made for all of the male candidates. Givhan's piece entitled "Wearing the Pants," begins,

The mind, so easily distracted by things mauve and lemon yellow, strays from more pressing concerns to ponder the sartorial: How many pantsuits does Hillary Clinton have in her closet? And does she ever wear them in the same combination more than once? The pantsuit is Clinton's uniform. Hers is a mix-and-match world, a grown-up land of Garanimals: black pants with gray jacket, tan jacket with black pants, tan jacket with tan pants.⁷¹

Firstly, this article appeared in a section of the *Washington Post's* special election coverage entitled, "The Front-Runners: Understanding the leading presidential candidates." The first question that any reader should ask is: What does this do to help me understand the Presidential candidate? Secondly, one should wonder what exactly Givhan thought she was contributing to the conversation on Clinton, the front runner, by

⁷¹ Robin Givhan, "Wearing the Pants," *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/08/AR2007120801502.html>.

writing an entire article about her pantsuits and why she wears them. The article goes on to say,

There are a host of reasons to explain Clinton's attachment to pantsuits. They are comfortable. They can be flattering, although not when the jacket hem aligns with the widest part of the hips (hypothetically speaking, of course). Does she even have hips? And because Clinton seems to prefer crossing her legs at the ankle -- in the way girls were taught when girls were still sent to finishing school -- there is less likelihood of any embarrassing straight-to-YouTube video.⁷²

Not only is the article entirely about Clinton's pantsuit collection, but also Givhan goes on to make unflattering comments about Clinton's body and the way in which she carries her body.

As previously noted, this article was posted in *The Washington Post* election coverage and was supposed to provide information about the candidate. Givhan contributes irrelevant information, as it is not important to critique a Presidential candidate's clothing choice, since it in no way helps the reader determine whether she is a good candidate for office. Additionally, Givhan objectifies Clinton in a powerful way, by focusing on her clothing choices and her body type, instead of the political issues of the moment. Never mind that there should never in politics coverage be a section entitled, "How She Looks," especially if its counterpart, "How He Looks" does not also exist somewhere nearby. Givhan does the female candidates in the election a disservice by feeding into this objectification, instead of contributing useful information to the conversation. And while Givhan may have only been a fashion editor for *The Washington Post*, one who received the Pulitzer Prize for criticism in 2006, it is negligent of *The Washington Post* editors to assume that the average reader is going to discern the

⁷² Givhan, "Wearing the Pants."

difference between her fashion opinion and the political opinions of a more widely well-known and well-respected political writer. It is the responsibility of the editors of this well-established paper to recognize that their readership may not discern between this unimportant information and important information, such as the candidate's stance on the important policy issues that the candidate will deal with should he or she be elected.

Conclusions

Clinton herself has recently commented on the biased media attention female candidates receive. When asked about the special attention paid to her hair, her pantsuits, and her other fashion choices, she remarked, "...clearly people should meet an acceptable threshold of appropriateness! I think that for many women in the public eye, it just seems that the burden is so heavy. We're doing a job that is not a celebrity job or an entertainment or fashion job... In a professional setting, treat us as professionals."⁷³ To her point, the print and television media does not always do what Clinton calls "appropriate" when reporting on female candidates and politicians. As evidenced from examples presented here, female candidates should not be portrayed in the media as celebrities or fashion icons, but instead as professional politicians. Until this difference is identified, female candidates are done a major disservice by the media as they work to shatter the glass ceiling at all levels of politics.

⁷³ Leive, "Career Advice From Hillary Rodham Clinton: 'You Don't Have To Be Perfect. Most Men Never Think Like That.'"

3

The Women of the United States Congress:
Past and Present

“When I first ran for public office...Although my son was a senior in high school, the question I was most frequently asked was, ‘Who’s going to be taking care of your children?’ And of course, it’s one of those questions that I don’t think a man has ever been asked when he has run for office.”-Nancy Pelosi, Former U.S. Speaker of the House

While the discussion of the shattering of the glass ceiling is still prevalent amongst political types, researchers, and the general public nationwide, there is evidence that things are improving. Following the 2014 midterm elections, there is a record number 100 women sitting in the United States Congress. While this is still not representative of the general public, it shows signs of slow, but steady improvement. Even more encouraging, much of the media attention on recent female candidates for the House and Senate has been less critical and biased and more informed. This is not to say that the problem is solved and the media is fairly representing all female candidates in Congressional elections, but it does help to provide a glimpse of better days ahead for female candidates running for President and other leadership positions.

Richard Logan Fox, author of *Gender Dynamics in Congressional Elections* and an extensive researcher on the topic of women and elective office, notes the importance of the experience of female candidates. He remarks, “The experiences of female candidates have great significance for understanding recent electoral politics and the continued underrepresentation of women in governing institutions. Elections provide the best window into the dynamics of the political process and the clearest opportunity to determine whether women have been accepted into that process.”⁷⁴ While he made this comment during his analysis of the 1992 and 1994 elections, the sentiment holds true.

⁷⁴ Richard Logan Fox, *Gender Dynamics in Congressional Elections* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1997).

Assessing the elections of female candidates, whether it be looking at the candidates nominated and elected, looking at the issues covered, or looking at the media coverage of the candidates and the election as a whole, sheds important light onto the good and the bad. What is evidenced from more recent elections is that the trend, while not perfect, is positive. Women Congressional candidates still face negative and biased media coverage, but it is less aggressive and prevalent as that of presidential candidates.

Nancy Pelosi: First Female Speaker of the United States House of Representatives

In a time when feminism is a hot topic in society and the feminist movement is alive and strong, the question that still bears answering is why do so few women occupy elective office, whether it be at the national, state or local level? In the current 114th Congress, a record number of 84 women are serving in the United States House of Representatives. For a house that has the word “representative” in it, how representative is that truly? Not nearly enough, as a body cannot possibly be representative of the people when only 19% of the Representatives are women. As has been previously discussed, many factors play into why women do not run for office at the same rate as men and why they are often less successful, such as lack of encouragement to enter politics from an early age, family obligations, fundraising struggles, etc. Many of these issues can be changed or helped. We as a nation can be more aware and work to encourage our young girls to be politically active and seek positions of power. We as a nation can share the duties and challenges of raising and caring for our families. Evidence shows that this is already the case, in fact. However, one of the issues that still plagues female candidates is their media coverage. This chapter looks at the media coverage of women in the United

States Congress and addresses the challenges and successes this body has faced in becoming more representative of the United States.

While fair representation in Congress is still a challenge women face, a major barrier was broken in January 2007 when Nancy Pelosi of California was sworn in as the first female Speaker of the House of Representatives. This was considered a huge moment for the women's movement and is still considered so eight years later. As Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless remark in their research "A Non-Gendered Lens?"

These obstacles are important because decades of research in both American and comparative politics suggests that women's presences in political institutions bears directly on issues of substantive and symbolic representation. Electing more women not only reduces the possibility that politicians will overlook gender-salient issues, but can also infuse into the political system a style of leadership that values congeniality and cooperation. Moreover, women in politics bring to the government a greater sense of political legitimacy.⁷⁵

Pelosi's election to Speaker of the House suggested, and still does, a time in which women would begin to be considered as politically viable as male candidates had been since the beginning of the Congress. It represented an opportunity, with Pelosi at the helm, for women to have a powerful and influential voice in Congress and be the cooperative change-makers as Hayes and Lawless suggest. As Yasmine Dabbous and Amy Ladley, researchers who have focused on newspaper coverage of Ms. Pelosi as Speaker of the House, note, "Pelosi's success as a totem for women in government... is only measureable insofar as we are able to say that she manages to overcome the institutional and social barriers to women in office, namely the ability to achieve a high level of office--which she has done--and the ability to be perceived and articulated as a

⁷⁵ Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless, "A Non-Gendered Lens? Media, Voters, and Female Candidates in Contemporary Congressional Elections," *American Political Science Association* 13, 1(March 2015): 95-118.

credible and competent leader.”⁷⁶ While I have argued here that media can be biased against women and can often hinder their success in national election, Dabbous and Ladly, “...contend that...news coverage of female candidates and women in office reflects the broader view of women in American society.”⁷⁷ This is likely the case, as media is apt to tell the story their readers want to hear.

On January 6, 2007, the week in which Nancy Pelosi was elected to the position of Speaker of the House, an opinion column ran in *The Capital Times* in Madison, Wisconsin. It read,

There is always a debate about whether it is appropriate to make a big deal about political firsts. And there is good reason to believe that there are times when it is better to accept officials for who they are, rather than to see them merely as pioneers in breaking down the artificial yet still strong barriers of gender, race, class, religion and sexuality. But we share the view of our friends at the National Organization for Women, who this week are celebrating the fact that Nancy Pelosi is now the most powerful woman in American history. As the first woman to serve as speaker of the House, the California Democrat is in a position to define the legislative branch of government. And she is third in line to the presidency. No woman has ever climbed so high on the federal ladder. And NOW President Kim Gandy is essentially right when she says: ‘This is a historic moment for women everywhere -- Nancy Pelosi has broken through the marble ceiling. With the House under Speaker Pelosi’s leadership, women are now more hopeful for a better future.’⁷⁸

This article brings up an important point. It is likely true that sometimes it is better to accept officials for who they are, whether they are breaking down artificial barriers or not. However, what is most interesting about the opinion piece is the respect and praise paid not so much to Speaker Pelosi herself, but to the office of Speaker of the House and

⁷⁶ Yasmine Dabbous and Amy Ladley, “A Spine of Steel and a Heart of Gold: Newspaper Coverage of the First Female Speaker of the House,” *Journal of Gender Studies*, 19, 2, (June 2010): 181-194.

⁷⁷ Dabbous and Ladley, “A Spine of Steel and a Heart of Gold: Newspaper Coverage of the First Female Speaker of the House.”

⁷⁸ “A Woman in Charge,” *The Capital Times*, January 6, 2007.

to the power that that office holds no matter who sits in the seat. The piece also shows high level of respect for Ms. Pelosi for breaking the “marble ceiling” and gives hope for the future of women seeking elected offices, especially the most powerful of those offices.

Not all the coverage of Ms. Pelosi during her time as Speaker is this respectful and fair. In February of 2007, an article titled, “Power already has gone to Pelosi’s head,” ran in the *Valley Morning Star* in Harlingen, Texas. The editorial was in response to a *Washington Times* story that reported on Speaker Pelosi’s request to President Bush for a military jet for her travels instead of flying commercially. The editorial read, “What she wants isn’t some pathetic little puddle jumper, but a military transport fit for a queen -- a plane one Republican critic dubbed ‘Pelosi One’ and another called a ‘flying Lincoln bedroom’ -- that can fly Pelosi non-stop to California and spares her the indignity of having to slog through airport security or share space with commoners.”⁷⁹ This editorial ran in Texas a mere one month after Speaker Pelosi was sworn in as Speaker of the House. Yet, one can already see that the media is not playing nicely by portraying her in a negative light. Earlier in this same editorial, Speaker Pelosi is referred to as a “prima-donna.” While the goal of the editorial was to show how quickly the Speakership can go to someone’s head, it quickly takes a turn towards targeting not any Speaker, but a female Speaker. By referring to Speaker Pelosi as both a “prima-donna” and a “queen” in the same breath, the author insinuates that the issue of her request is that she is a demanding woman, not that she is a demanding Speaker.

Before Pelosi was even elected Speaker of the House, she began facing challenges from the media that only she as the female candidate was likely to face. In coverage of

⁷⁹ “Power Already has Gone to Pelosi’s Head,” *Valley Morning Star*, February 8, 2007.

the election in November 2006, Juliet Eilprin, a politics reporter for the Washington Post, wrote a piece on how Pelosi climbed the political ladder and came to be in the position she was about to obtain as the Democrats won back the House. Towards the end of the article, which is mostly focused on the good politician that Pelosi is and how she got to where she is, Eilprin concludes with,

Even as she has climbed the leadership ladder, however, Pelosi has been attentive to domestic matters such as caring for her five grandchildren. Her sixth could be born at any moment: Pelosi's daughter Alexandra was due to give birth last week, and the congresswoman made it clear she would leave Washington as soon as labor began, even if it started on election night.⁸⁰

It is apparent that in covering a powerful female politician, it is still necessary to identify her feminine, or maternal, side, that which makes her different from most of her colleagues. Eilprin's mention of Ms. Pelosi's role as both a grandmother and a mother can be seen as doing both positive and negative things for her image, especially as one about to hold a powerful position in American politics. Firstly, Eilprin's comment insinuates that above all else, her role as matriarch of her family is her primary interest. While this is extremely respectable, it does bring into question her devotion to her upcoming role as Speaker of the House and brings into question whether she will bring the same devotion to that role. As we know now, she was a well-respected, hard-working Speaker, who was revered by her party and will be noted in the history books, not just as the first female Speaker, but as a powerful one at that.

⁸⁰ Juliet Eilprin, "Nancy Pelosi Set to Be First Female Speaker; Democrats' Majority Puts Her at Helm in January," *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2006, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/410045694.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Nov+8%2C+2006&author=Juliet+Eilprin+-+Washington+Post+Staff+Writer&pub=The+Washington+Post&edition=&startpage=&desc=Nancy+Pelosi+Set+to+Be+First+Female+Speaker%3B+Democrats%27+Majority+Puts+Her+at+Helm+in+January>.

Alternatively, this comment shows Ms. Pelosi's capability as a "matriarch figure" one not dissimilar to residing over the House of Representatives. It shows her ability to manage and lead, but in a feminine context. This can be seen as good or bad depending on the researcher, or the average person for that matter, who you ask about the subject. Should Nancy Pelosi have to prove her ability to do the job and be powerful in the position through the examples of her as a powerful matriarch and is it the media's role to assume that is the acceptable way to go about portraying her? That question remains unanswered. Dabbous and Ladley, however, remark that, "... the broad categories that reporters used to cover the climb to power of Nancy Pelosi suggested that both the American political establishment and the ideology informing news agendas are clearly paternalistic (there are no founding mothers after all)."⁸¹

In addition to her "maternal roles" in her personal life, Ms. Pelosi was described, throughout the print media, as tough and disciplined, as if those were negative attributes for the person second in line to the White House to have. Eilperin and Shailagh Murray commented,

The woman who will become speaker of the House in January is strong-willed and determined, an ambitious late bloomer who raised five kids, waded slowly into politics and now stands second in line of presidential succession. Republicans like to ridicule Pelosi as a San Francisco liberal, and her voting record suggests that at least on paper, they are not off base. But her Democratic colleagues describe her as far more pragmatic and realistic than the caricature suggests... When Pelosi wants her House colleagues to know she means business, she uses her 'mother of five voice.' She is a stickler for good behavior. Pelosi pledged on election night to lead 'the most honest, the most open and most ethical Congress in history'... 'She's got the toughness and tenacity of Maggie Thatcher, but

⁸¹ Dabbous and Ladley, "A Spine of Steel and a Heart of Gold: Newspaper Coverage of the First Female Speaker of the House."

she's nice about it,' [Rep.] Obey said.⁸²

While these are not necessarily negative traits being used to describe Speaker Pelosi, it is the idea that these traits make her different or unusual in her role. It is the relation of these traits to her sex and her role as a mother and a grandmother that are problematic for her and other female politicians. There is a bias in the way in which the print media writes about and portrays Ms. Pelosi that makes her appear unique or unusual. While it is certainly notable that she is the first female to hold her position, it does not mean she should be portrayed in any different light than those who have come before her or those who will come after her, whether they be male or female. On this issue, Dabbous and Ladley remark,

Nancy Pelosi, newly-elected first female Speaker of the House, was portrayed simultaneously as nurturing mother and hard-fisted ruler, as creator and destroyer, as caring and cunning... These results are important insofar as they support the persistent conclusion that women in American politics continue to be evaluated in gendered terms. Moreover, it is clear that this gendering is not simply the fault of journalists; gendered evaluations are so deeply engrained in our collective social and political psyche that they are, until illuminated, completely commonplace.⁸³

Dabbous and Ladley do make an important point in that this is not an issue that affects our print media solely, but certainly transcends the media to our general societal views on how we classify or describe men in comparison, or not, to women.

In addressing the coverage, overall, as Ms. Pelosi rose to the role of Speaker, it is

⁸² Shailagh Murray and Juliet Eilperin, "Pelosi Steps Into the Spotlight; New House Leader's Agenda, Management Style Take Center Stage," *The Washington Post* November 9, 2006, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/410079801.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Nov+9%2C+2006&author=Shailagh+Murray+and+Juliet+Eilperin+-+Washington+Post+Staff+Writers&pub=The+Washington+Post&edition=&startpage=&desc=Pelosi+Steps+Into+the+Spotlight%3B+New+House+Leader%27s+Agenda%2C+Management+Style+Take+Center+Stage>.

⁸³ Dabbous and Ladley, "A Spine of Steel and a Heart of Gold: Newspaper Coverage of the First Female Speaker of the House."

important to note the times in which her womanhood, her role as a mother and a grandmother, etc. is referenced. It is also important to note phrases used to describe her that would not necessarily be used to describe Ms. Pelosi's male counterparts.

Four years after Ms. Pelosi lost the Speakership to her Republican counterpart, John Boehner, Pelosi spoke to some of the sexism she felt she faced from the media. In comments she made in response to a question asked at a press conference about whether she had thought about stepping down as minority leader after the Democrats lost the house for the fourth time since her Speakership, she remarked,

When was the day when any of you said Mitch McConnell, when they lost the Senate three times in a row, 'Aren't you getting a little old, Mitch? Shouldn't you step aside.' Have any of you ever asked him that question? It's interesting as a woman to see how many times that question is asked of a woman and how many times that question is never asked of Mitch McConnell.⁸⁴

In this interaction, Ms. Pelosi sheds light onto the discrimination and bias she feels she faces from the media regarding the difference in the questions media will ask a male politician versus a female politician. In that same press conference, Pelosi goes on to say, "I was never on *Time* magazine cover even though I was the first woman to be Speaker. Isn't that a curiosity? That the Republicans win, Boehner's on *Time* magazine. Mitch McConnell wins, he's on the cover of *Time* magazine. Isn't there a pattern here?"⁸⁵ Pelosi, in both of these remarks, notes the barriers that even powerful women still face in actually being at the top and these unsurprisingly are barriers women face in making it to the top as well. They receive biased questions from the media who should be a fair and unbiased body, sharing important and valuable news with the public.

⁸⁴ Sara Fischer, "Pelosi: Boehner, McConnell got Time covers, but I never did," *CNN*, November 13, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/13/politics/pelosi-cover-time-magazine/>.

⁸⁵ Sara Fischer, "Pelosi: Boehner, McConnell got Time covers, but I never did."

The House of Representatives Becomes Increasingly Diverse, but Does the Media Coverage?

As the 2014 election came upon us, there was an increased focus inside the Republican Party to change up their party inside the House and Senate in order to be increasingly appealing to a younger, more diversified base. This helped create good opportunities for candidates such as Mia Love and Elise Stefanik to win election to the House, becoming the first black, Mormon woman of Haitian decent and the youngest woman ever elected to Congress, respectively. Despite the need for the Republican Party to diversify, it does not mean that these candidates were not susceptible to questionable media coverage.

Prior to her election to the House of Representatives as Congresswoman for Utah's 4th Congressional District, Mia Love was the Mayor for Saratoga Springs, Utah. This was her second run for the seat after losing marginally in 2012. She was a speaker at the 2012 Republican National Convention, and was and continues to be seen by the Republican Party as an up and comer who has the potential to help change the current image of the party as old, stale, and out of touch with young and diverse communities.

While there has been lots of focus on the possibilities for Love within the party and much discussion about her dynamism, the media coverage of her leading up to and following her election does not so much focus on her qualifications or abilities, but the many "firsts" she potentially creates. Immediately after her election, The Salt Lake Tribune ran an editorial that read,

Perhaps the most famous of the many new members of Congress is a woman from Utah. It is no disrespect to note that Mia Love, the new representative from Utah's 4th District, is attracting so much attention largely because of her gender, along with her ethnic background. As the first black female Republican ever elected to Congress, she is bound to

attract national, even global, attention.⁸⁶

This editorial speaks for itself: the focus is on Love's gender and ethnic background, not how her political background or her expertise makes her qualified to be the newest Congresswoman for Utah's 4th district. This editorial perpetuates exactly what it addresses, by choosing to focus on her gender and ethnicity.

In an attempt to redeem itself later, the piece goes on to say, "Love's success on the national scene can also be reasonably portrayed as Utah's success. As a sign that our mostly conservative, overwhelmingly white electorate isn't averse to voting for a black woman when her positions on the issues are seen to match theirs."⁸⁷ This is the only sentence in the entire editorial that mentions Love's stance on issues that affect her constituents. This is also the only time in the editorial where the assumption is made that her stance on the issues may resonate with her voters, allowing them to vote based on those qualifications as opposed to her breaking down barriers. By focusing such great attention on her breaking barriers, this commentary on Mia Love allows little room for discussion of her qualifications for the job. While she has already been elected to her position, this type of media coverage is biased and does not portray Love in terms of the traits that are imperative to her ability to do her job. It instead focuses on those things that she has little to no control over, her race and her gender.

Another post election piece on Mia Love did not even bother to mention her political qualifications for Congress, but instead remarked,

Perhaps most remarkable, Mia Love of Utah became the first black Republican woman elected to Congress - ever. She is also the first Haitian-American to serve in Congress, the daughter of first-generation

⁸⁶ "Editorial: More women must run," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, November 7, 2014, <http://www.sltrib.com/opinion/1797412-155/women-utah-state-political-legislature-female>.

⁸⁷ "Editorial: More women must run," *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

immigrants whose life story follows the classic American dream. Oh, and did I mention she is Mormon? Love embodies several uncommon pairings. A Black conservative. A Black Utahan. A Black Mormon. A suburban mom and a politician. Some of Love's characteristics are hardly unusual, but it is refreshing to see them represented on the national political stage. A working mom of young kids. Committed to her biracial family. A person of sincere faith. An accomplished, ambitious woman representing a religiously conservative community.⁸⁸

Classifying Love's election as "remarkable" because she is the first black, female Republican of Haitian descent to serve in Congress demeans her and her political qualifications for the position, as she is not strictly defined by her heritage, which she has no control over. By focusing on her ethnicity, her religion, and her role as a mother, the emphasis is removed from the political and professional work she has accomplished to rise up to her position. Not only is this coverage biased and belittling to her position of power, it does nothing to inform the readers of the *St. Louis Dispatch* or her constituents of what kind of representative she will be. This is really what is important for constituents to know and understand when electing an official as well as after that official enters office. Welch does at least mention that Love is "accomplished" and "ambitious," but does nothing to qualify these praises in regards to her achievements. While voters clearly felt they knew and understood Love's background enough to vote her into office, the media's focus on her breaking barriers does nothing to inform the public about the type of politician she is.

After the 2014 election, Jonathan Easley of *The Hill* wrote a piece on the many GOP women who won hard fought elections. On Mia Love, Joni Ernst, and others, he commented, "'These were strong female candidates that had to get through tough primaries, even before the general election,' a representative for the National Republican

⁸⁸ Rosalynde Welch, "Faith Perspectives: Woman's win shatters barriers Mia Love, a Mormon, is the first black, Republican woman member of Congress," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 8, 2014.

Congressional Committee (NRCC) told The Hill. ‘They had great backgrounds and could go tell voters what they planned to do. They were all very impressive.’”⁸⁹ This coverage of Love and other Republican female candidates is unique in that there is absolutely no mention of the potential barriers they could break, but instead it is entirely focused on the qualifications and hard work of the candidates. This media coverage could be describing male candidates and no one would know the difference, because there is no bias, no sexualization and no sexist language of any kind used in describing the candidates. The other way in which this coverage differs is that it is “inside the beltway” coverage from a Capitol Hill paper. This begs the question, does the local coverage of national politics, that is, less revered journalists and newspapers, portray female politicians differently than those politics-focused papers often found inside Washington, D.C.? The examples here lead one to think that is certainly a possibility, but more research and comparison would be necessary to discern or to conclude with more certainty.

Another groundbreaker during the 2014 election was Elise Stefanik, the youngest woman to ever be elected to the United States House of Representatives. As a young woman, Stefanik stood to face increased bias in the form of ageism in addition to sexism. However, this does not appear to have occurred, based on the coverage reviewed for this research. This could mean that the media and American society and culture find age less threatening than gender, or it could simply mean that this bias is trumped by other biases. It also could be that Stefanik tactfully used her age as a positive rather than a negative in order to not give her opponent, or the media, the opportunity to use it against her.

In the days leading up to the 2014 election, Elise Stefanik was in a tight election

⁸⁹ Jonathan Easley, “Women flood ranks of GOP,” *The Hill*, December 11, 2014, <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/226729-women-flood-ranks-of-gop>.

in Upstate New York to become the newest Congresswoman for the 21st district. Jesse McKinley of the *New York Times* wrote,

The favorite in the race in the 21st Congressional District of New York lives in a house owned by her mother. Her current job is in plywood sales and marketing. And the first time she was old enough to vote for president, she cast a ballot for George W. Bush. In his re-election. Elise M. Stefanik, 30, is trying to become the youngest woman elected to the House of Representatives, and she is doing so with a burst of youthful enthusiasm: constantly speaking — and smiling — in front of small groups, zipping across her gargantuan upstate district and trumpeting what she calls her “fresh ideas” and “forward-leaning” approach to governance. ‘I understand firsthand that Washington is broken,’ said Ms. Stefanik, who graduated from Harvard in 2006, served as an aide to President Bush and led the debate-preparation team in 2012 for the Republican vice-presidential nominee, Representative Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin. “And I believe that as a country we need new young leaders.’⁹⁰

By selling herself as the youthful, vivacious candidate, Stefanik subtly changed the conversation during her campaign, from her age being a deterrent to her ability to lead her district, to a positive. While McKinley was clearly focused on her age, versus her qualifications, in his piece, he portrays it as a positive aspect of Stefanik’s capabilities. In doing so, he also mentions the positions she has held in the administration and in previous Republican campaigns, referencing her hard work and knowledge of politics as a young leader, again classifying this as good as opposed to bad. Notably, there is no focus on her being a woman, as again, this coverage could easily describe either a male or female candidate.

Elise Stefanik was included in a review of notable GOP recently elected members to watch, following the 2014 election. Ashley Parker and Jonathan Weisman of the *New York Times* noted,

⁹⁰ Jesse McKinley, “In Upstate New York House Race, Republican Makes Her Youth a Selling Point,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/29/nyregion/in-upstate-new-york-house-race-republican-makes-her-youth-a-selling-point.html?_r=0.

Elise Stefanik cast herself, first and foremost, as a small-business leader, helping run the plywood company founded by her family in upstate New York over two decades ago. But Ms. Stefanik's victory in New York's 21st Congressional District also makes her, at age 30, the youngest woman ever to be elected to Congress. She also has an impressive résumé. Ms. Stefanik, a Harvard graduate, helped run debate preparations for Representative Paul Ryan's 2012 vice-presidential campaign, and she sharpened her political skills in President George W. Bush's White House, as part of his Domestic Policy Council staff. And expect to see much more of her -- after all, a young Republican congresswoman is added value for a party that has struggled to attract female voters.⁹¹

This caption of Stefanik primarily focuses on her role as a small-business leader as well as an integral part of both President Bush's and Representative Paul Ryan's teams during crucial times in their careers. While it mentions her age and her sex, it is not the focus of the piece, nor is it used to belittle her prestige and experience. Only in the final sentence is there even discussion of how her gender may affect her politics, and little is said to detract from her qualifications for her position as Congresswoman. Overall, this coverage is not only favorable, but fairly void of bias.

In researching the coverage of Stefanik prior to and after her election, she received almost entirely positive coverage. It is worth noting that as a young politician, female or male, there is less baggage and history to drag up and less likely to be drama or controversy that can arise. This seems to have certainly been the case with Stefanik. Additional coverage of her in local New York papers was just as positive and mostly unbiased as of that in *The New York Times*. Dan Friedman of the *New York Daily News* reported,

Stefanik, who worked in President George W. Bush's White House on domestic policy and helped to write the Republican National Committee's

⁹¹ Ashley Parker and Jonathan Weisman, "The G.O.P.'s Names to Watch," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2014, <http://mobile.nytimes.com/slideshow/100000003219630/2014/11/06/us/politics/rising-stars-in-the-republican-party.html>.

2012 platform, has been arguably the most heralded incoming House Republican. Top Republicans frequently tout her as a sign the GOP can reach young women - a group that leans Democratic. Far from downplaying her youth, Stefanik has embraced it. "I really have leaned into the fact that I was a young candidate," she said. She will also likely be a cautious voice. Noted during her campaign for a reluctance to ad-lib, Stefanik in an interview stuck closely to talking points. She repeatedly veered off the record to discuss even noncontroversial topics. Stefanik comes off as both a polished politician and youthfully earnest.⁹²

Here, Stefanik is portrayed as a candidate who is capable and qualified, unafraid to make the tough decisions, but also smart enough to know when to play it safe. Her age, nor her gender, are the focus of the article, and are generally only mentioned in passing, as physical descriptions of the candidate. This is similar to most of the coverage of Stefanik reviewed in this research. There is no discussion of how her gender does or does not qualify her for her position, but only mentions it as a descriptor. There is no discussion of her clothing or her haircuts, her femininity or lack thereof.

Overall, there is a general respect for the candidate and her qualifications and little to no bias is used in the coverage leading up to her election or following it. As earlier surmised, it could be that while her age could be used against her, it is in fact a benefit in that there is less to look at in covering her background from a media perspective. It could also be that Stefanik portrayed herself in way that made her unimpenetrable by the media. However, that seems unlikely to be the case, as most other female candidates have not been able to do so. It could also be that media coverage of female candidates is slowly changing, especially for women entering politics today. Candidates such as Love and Stefanik who are new to Congress, and not being analyzed on such a national scale, appear to receive less biased and sexist media coverage, whether

⁹² Dan Friedman, "A 'Fresh' New Look GOP Rookies Show Increased Diversity," *New York Daily News*, November 23, 2014.

it is locally or nationally. This is not just in some cases, but in most.

Media Coverage of the Esteemed Senate Women

As previously mentioned, women in Congress who are not necessarily at the top of leadership are seeing progress in their coverage by the media. However this has not always been the case. Kim Fridkin Kahn, a leading expert in research on media coverage of women candidates notes, "... because female candidates for the U.S. Senate are relatively rare, their candidacies may be treated as more newsworthy and they may subsequently receive more coverage than their male counterparts. Differences in the coverage of male and female candidates may also emerge if reporters and editors hold certain sex stereotypes and if these stereotypes influence coverage patterns."⁹³ Kahn made this statement in 1991 when women candidates for Senate were indeed, rare. However, today, in 2015, we have a record number 20 senators in the U.S. Senate. While that is not parity, it is far less unusual to see a woman candidate for a Senate seat. This brings about the question, does Kahn and Goldenberg's theory still hold true? Does the coverage of women candidates lead to common use of stereotypes?

With the beginning of the 114th Congress, Joni Ernst of Red Oak, Iowa, became the new junior Republican United States Senator for her state. Prior to winning this seat, she was a Republican member of the Iowa State Senate for three years in addition to a lieutenant colonel in the Iowa Army National Guard. She is the first woman to represent Iowa in the U.S. Congress and the first female veteran to serve in the U.S. Senate. Ernst represents a type of candidate and politician the Republican Party is consistently trying to recruit as they look to brand themselves as inclusive. Broadly speaking, the coverage of

⁹³ Kim Fridkin Kahn and Edie N. Goldenberg, "Women Candidates in the News: An Examination of Gender Differences in U.S. Senate Campaign Coverage."

Senator Ernst, during the election to her position as Senator, was widely positive and often less biased toward gender than the other candidates who have been discussed throughout this research, particularly given the fact that Iowans had never elected a female politician to represent them in U.S. Congress.

In looking through the print media coverage of then-State Senator Ernst, she is often portrayed as strong, but not too strong, feminine, but not too feminine, and tough, but not too tough, a balance that many other candidates have struggled to find throughout their candidacies and even while sitting in Congress. Maeve Reston of the *Los Angeles Times* noted, “So how did she pull it off in a state that has so long resisted making women its top leaders? A weak opponent, a breakthrough ad in the hog barn that went viral, and a carefully cultivated image that female politicians from Hillary Rodham Clinton to Sarah Palin have struggled to translate into votes. Tough, strong, but nonthreatening.”⁹⁴ As is mentioned in this piece and throughout this research, Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin struggled throughout their candidacies to strike the balance that Ernst seems to have found so effortlessly in the media’s portrayal. It could be that she was unknown nationally, it could be that she is a military veteran, which tends to command great respect from reporters and citizens alike, or it could be that she just did a good job of portraying herself to the media. Ernst appears to have transcended some of the major issues many female politicians face in the print media.

Certainly Joni Ernst’s role as the potential first female combat veteran to serve in Congress won her some positive praise and support from the media both during her

⁹⁴ Maeve Reston, “In Iowa GOP’s Joni Ernst broke a gender barrier on her own terms,” *LA Times*, November 7, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/politics/la-na-joni-ernst-women-20141108-story.html>.

campaign and once she arrived in Congress. She herself noted the importance of her election, which Thomas Barton of the *Telegraph Herald* in Dubuque, Iowa, included in his article on her historic role. Barton notes,

Ernst's November victory over U.S. Rep. Bruce Braley in a high-profile U.S. Senate race marked the first time Iowa has elected a woman to federal office. She also became the first female combat veteran elected to serve in the U.S. Senate... During a conference call with Iowa reporters following her swearing in, Ernst said, ' "As a mother, and a soldier and an independent voice for Iowa, I am committed to bringing these values to Washington."'⁹⁵

Barton's mention of Ernst's role as the first female combat veteran to be elected to the Senate and his inclusion of her quote mentioning the importance of her role as a soldier show how important Barton thought this particular issue would be to the local readers of the *Telegraph Herald* in Iowa. While this article does mention that this is the first time Iowa has elected a woman to the Senate, Barton has chosen not to mention Ernst's womanhood excessively, nor does he portray her in biased terms. He does include her quote, which mentions that she is a mother, but again does not focus heavily on her role as a mother, but instead her role as a combat veteran. This implies that Barton has determined that his readers are likely less concerned with the gender of the candidate, but instead the aspects of her life that might play a true role in the type of politician she will become upon her arrival in Congress.

What is acutely noteworthy about the coverage of Joni Ernst is that she was so widely unknown nationally and still received overall positive and unbiased coverage from the print media. Tanya Melich has extensively studied first-time women candidates

⁹⁵ Thomas J. Barton, "Historic: Ernst takes oath, seat in Senate," *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, January 7, 2015, http://www.thonline.com/news/tri-state/article_eac17de1-88d8-5180-93d8-062cb00468b2.html.

for Congress and observes,

First-time women congressional candidates in open seats are especially vulnerable to excessively aggressive negative attacks...because... the press does a poor job of covering suburban-rural races and independent fact checking is virtually nonexistent...since 9/11, terrorism has become a major issue and women are apt to be portrayed as too inexperienced to be trusted with protecting national defense... While a majority of voters now believe that women have equal opportunity and can be excellent public officials, some voters still view women candidates as emotionally unstable and lacking the psychic strength to function in the political world.⁹⁶

What potentially makes Ernst defy Melich's statements is firstly, the fact, that in these polarized political times, every seat, especially the Senate seats up in the 2014 elections, count, and therefore, the media covers the candidates more closely than has previously been done. Melich's point about 9/11 certainly stands true, as we have since consistently faced threats to our nation's security. However, as has been discussed, Ernst is a combat veteran who more than many in Congress can speak to these issues through her and others' first hand experiences dealing with terrorism and terrorist threats, defying the assumption that women are not capable or qualified to protect national defense.

Most importantly, Ernst was tactical in the way she portrayed herself, therefore affecting the media coverage she garnered. By playing up her role as a mother and a combat soldier, she showed her ability to balance her difficult work life with her equally as challenging and important personal role of mother. By running campaign ads explaining how she grew up on a farm castrating hogs, she showed her toughness, but toughness that the average Iowan could understand and relate to. Ultimately, while using many of the attributes that only a woman might have, but portraying them in a specific

⁹⁶ Tanya Melich, "From the Trenches: Attacking First-Time Women Candidates for Congress," *Journal of Women Politics & Policy* 27, 1-2(2005): 85-107.

manner, she was the candidate who both men and women could relate to.

In Sheryl Gay Stolberg's October 2014 *International New York Times* piece on Ernst entitled, "An Iowans' playbook, for women to win men's vote," she focuses on Ernst's role as the potential first female to be elected to Congress from the state of Iowa. She also portrays Ernst from a point of view not often seen when covering female politicians. She remarks,

Joni Ernst, the Republican Senate nominee in Iowa, motors along the state's back roads in a tour bus festooned with giant images of herself, an American flag, a cornfield and the tag line: "Mother. Soldier. Independent Leader..." "I'm not running on my gender," she insists. By running to make history without saying so, Ms. Ernst, 44, is helping to write a new playbook for Republican female candidates. In a year that is proving challenging for women running for the Senate from both parties, Ms. Ernst has broken through with a powerful political message that has helped her build a surprisingly enthusiastic base of support - among men... But Ms. Ernst is hardly ignoring her gender. Her ads offer a playful take on masculine endeavors. There she is firing a gun. There she is riding a Harley-Davidson. There she is boasting about "castrating hogs on an Iowa farm." But interspersed among those images are other, softer cues: In one new ad, she is seated at a kitchen table talking about "the Iowa we leave our children"; in another, she says she learned the "key to a great biscuit" while working at a fast-food restaurant.⁹⁷

This portrayal of Ernst was particularly interesting because the biases are laid out in the open, purposefully so, in order to show how Ernst is running in comparison to other female candidates in similar shoes. While Stolberg identifies Ernst as a woman, she includes comments from Ernst who explicitly says she is not running based on her gender, nor is she ignoring it. This piece is also thought provoking in the sense that while her gender is discussed, it is not over or under sold, but just plainly stated. The article

⁹⁷ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Joni Ernst's Playbook, for Women to Win Men's Vote," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/29/us/iowans-playbook-for-women-to-win-mens-vote.html>.

also explains some of the ways women use their gender to their advantage, or avoid it to their advantage when necessary.

Depictions of female candidates and politicians like this one by Stolberg are becoming more common. Instead of negatively portraying women, because they are women, there is more of a focus on what women have to do to get elected in a society that is not only still mostly dominated by men, including voters, but in a society that sees things in masculine and feminine terms. What is so unusual about Stolberg's piece is that it is all laid out in the open, as if to say, "Here are the biases, here are the ones Ernst is using to her advantage, here are the ones she is avoiding, and most importantly, here are the societal and cultural challenges that a female has to face and figure out and to overcome in order to get elected to national office."

While Ernst received positive media coverage during her campaign and since she has been elected, she, like the female politicians before her, did receive some coverage that appeared overly sexualized. Monica Hesse of the *Washington Post* reported, "Ernst, 44, the biscuit-baking, gun-shooting, twangy, twinkly farm girl and mother whose ads emphasize her knowledge of hog castration ('Make 'em squeal, Joni!' yell her fans) puts down the itinerary and nods. Ready, she tells the driver - and a tour she feels will help determine not only an election but also the soul of Iowa is rolling again."⁹⁸ The portrayal of Ernst as a "biscuit-baking, twangy, twinkly farm girl," whether the writer intended to do so or not, delegitimizes Ms. Ernst as a serious candidate for a serious political position. It is difficult to imagine a situation in which a male candidate might be

⁹⁸ Monica Heese, "Joni Ernst, trumpeting 'the Iowa way,' shakes up her state," *The Washington Post*, October 26, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/joni-ernst-trumpeting-the-iowa-way-shakes-up-her-statejoni-earnst/2014/10/26/8387b208-592d-11e4-bd61-346aee66ba29_story.html.

portrayed using this same language. Media coverage such as Hesse's does not provide any useful information about the candidate, positive or negative, that would help a potential voter gain understanding of the type of Senator she might be. Discussing her "knowledge of hog castration" insinuates that this is where Ernst's focus lies, which, whether you like and support her or not, we must assume is not true, given her history as a soldier and an Iowa State Senator. While this type of portrayal of Ernst did not stop her from getting elected, it is an interesting and telling example of national news coverage of local politicians and the little respect they garner from larger media entities.

Like Joni Ernst after her, Kirsten Gillibrand has similarly received a mixed bag of biased and unbiased media attention throughout her time as a Senator. Kirsten Gillibrand was the Representative for the 20th district of New York from 2007 to 2009 and was selected by Governor David Paterson to fill Senator Clinton's seat after President-Elect Barack Obama selected Clinton to be his Secretary of State. Gillibrand then ran in a special election in 2010 where she took over 60% of the vote. She was then reelected in 2012 by an overwhelming 72% of the vote. This is all to say that Senator Gillibrand is well liked and well respected by her constituents, based on their voting record. Like Ernst, Gillibrand has seen much more positive media attention than many of the women running for more powerful leadership roles, such as President and Vice President, or those in positions of higher power, such as Nancy Pelosi. However, Gillibrand, as a younger woman, by Senate standards, and a mother, has continued to see some of the media bias that has been discussed throughout this research.

As Senator Gillibrand was not elected to her seat, originally, she faced criticism and questioning as to whether she was qualified and capable to lead as the junior Senator

from New York. Journalists from the *New York Observer* were particularly critical and biased in their coverage of Gillibrand. A June 2009 piece on Gillibrand entitled “Gillibrand Keeps Selling Senator Mom” read,

In the latest installment of Kirsten Gillibrand's effort to rebrand herself as Senator Working Mom in the wake of a messy Senate selection process, she is today announcing a "three-point plan to address autism," according to a release from her Senate office. Gillibrand will promote the measure on a conference call-during which there is a high possibility that she will utter the word "mom"- later this afternoon.⁹⁹

The use of language such as “Senator Working Mom” and the focus on her role as a mother certainly insinuates that she is only equipped to talk about her plan for autism due to the fact that she is a mother. Additionally, in informing readers of a press release from a Senator, there is no reason for descriptive language like this to be used.

While this language is subtly placed in this short 122-word piece, it is powerful and often debilitating to female members of Congress. David Niven and Jeremy Zilber whose research entitled “How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress” focuses on gender and media coverage of women in Congress note,

...the portrayal of women members is not the product of differences in the images sought or the presentation made by women. Rather, the results are consistent with the conclusion that media coverage of women in Congress is more the product of the media than of the women... while some of the ‘cheerleader,’ ‘motherhood,’ and ‘fashion’ coverage women... garner may appear innocuous, this coverage is completely inconsistent with the image women need to project to compete successfully for the highest offices in this country.¹⁰⁰

As was mentioned in the *New York Observer* piece, Gillibrand was facing challenges in 2009 during the “messy Senate selection process.” While the *Observer’s* piece was

⁹⁹ Jason Horowitz, “Gillibrand Keeps Selling Senator Mom,” *New York Observer*, June 2, 2009, <http://observer.com/2009/06/gillibrand-keeps-selling-senator-mom/>.

¹⁰⁰ David Niven and Jeremy Zilber, “How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress?”, *Women & Politics* 23, 1-2 (2001), 147-165.

meant to inform its readers of the actions one of New York's Senators was taking to combat a growing problem in the community, the article does not convey an image of Gillibrand that conveys her ability to do her job. It is one thing for an article to criticize a Senator, male or female, if the paper or the journalist thinks that person is in the wrong or doing a poor job as a representative, but it is an entirely separate thing to portray a female politician in a light that focuses on her gender, as opposed to her ability, or lack thereof, to do her job.

What is interesting about Senator Gillibrand, however, is how she has used her sometimes-biased media coverage to her political advantage, showing that she can and does have and do it all. In a *Vogue* cover article in 2010, this is evident. As *Vogue* commented on a constituent event in Upstate New York,

This kind of event, when staged by a different sort of politician, one less finely attuned to small-town attitudes, could strike a casual observer as too perfect to be real. But Gillibrand is nothing if not genuine, and through sheer force of personality she bends the occasion to suit her style, which is essentially folksy and earnest. She radiates kindness. But she is also direct and no-nonsense. Despite the fact that she is a Democrat (and a fairly progressive one, at that) and worked for fifteen years as a hotshot Manhattan lawyer, she seems utterly at ease among this crowd of mostly Republican farmers, with their rough hands and weathered faces. Indeed, when she arrived moments earlier—in a plain-Jane beige linen suit and flat shoes—she walked around the room and introduced herself to everyone, including the children, shaking hands and looking everyone directly in the eyes: ‘Thank you for coming out today.’¹⁰¹

While some of this coverage could be considered sexist or biased, the discussion of her choice of clothing, the use of languages such as “folksy” and “earnest”, and even the discussion of her previous career choice, Gillibrand has clearly positioned herself so that the media, *Vogue* included, still generally takes her seriously and considers her a formidable member of the United States Senate. Throughout much of the coverage

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Van Meter, “In Hillary’s Footsteps: Kirsten Gillibrand,” *Vogue*, October 10, 2010.

reviewed on her, Gillibrand is covered fairly and respectfully. While there is mention of her as a mother and a woman, much more focus is paid to her political expertise and her powerful role in the Senate. This is one example in which female politicians have established that they are effective representatives and politicians who are also noteworthy women and mothers.

Even as a relatively unknown member of the House of Representatives, Gillibrand did certainly receive some positive coverage that portrays her in fair, unbiased terms. A *Newsday* article, published after Ms. Gillibrand was selected to fill Clinton's seat read,

She speaks Chinese. She went to the same prestigious all-girls prep school as Jane Fonda. She worked for the same high-powered law firm hired by Al Gore during the 2000 presidential recount. And she hails from a political dynasty in Albany that began with her grandmother's efforts to help average working people, especially women. Kirsten Gillibrand, named Friday by Gov. David A. Paterson to fill Hillary Rodham Clinton's U.S. Senate seat, may be unknown to most New Yorkers, but to people familiar with her in upstate New York she is a dynamic go-getter whose sudden rise to the Senate is no surprise.¹⁰²

This piece, instead of harping on the fact that she is a mother and a woman, focuses on her qualifications for being the newest Senator from New York. The journalists use unbiased language such as “prestigious,” “high-powered,” and “dynamic go-getter” which both positively portray Gillibrand, but also are consistent with an image needed for a woman to compete successfully as previously discussed by Niven and Zilber. As they also remark, “What women legislators want from the media is a chance to speak for themselves and present the true nature of their agendas.”¹⁰³ This *Newsday* article does just that, it allows Gillibrand's accomplishments to speak for themselves rather than focusing

¹⁰² Bart Jones and Jennifer Smith, “Gillibrand's Rise Not Surprising to Those Who Know Her,” *Newsday*, January 25, 2009.

¹⁰³ Niven and Zilber, “How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress?”

on her sex or her role as a mother.

While *Newsday* is a local Long Island newspaper, read by locals and the nearby New York state readers, Gillibrand received similar positive, unbiased coverage from *The New York Times*, a publication read nationally and worldwide. One *New York Times* article announcing Governor Paterson's selection of Gillibrand to Clinton's seat read,

...Ms. Gillibrand...is considered a centrist and is known for her bold political moves... He [Paterson] said he saw in Ms. Gillibrand a "new kind of leadership.' While downstaters have been known for being condescending to upstaters in the past, he said, 'they will never condescend to Kirsten Gillibrand.' Mr. Paterson said he was particularly impressed with Ms. Gillibrand's command of financial issues, saying, 'She can talk you A to Z about agriculture, and A to ZZ about Wall Street.'... Ms. Gillibrand is largely unknown to New Yorkers statewide, but is considered an up-and-coming and forceful lawmaker in her district and has gained considerable attention from Democratic leaders in Washington.¹⁰⁴

Even as a fairly unknown Congresswoman, this is another example of the portrayal of an unbiased image of a female politician. As Kim Fridkin Kahn and Edie Goldenberg have noted throughout their research on the topic of media coverage of women candidates, "...media can influence what voters learn about candidates as well as the criteria voters use when evaluating candidates....If the media rely on certain stereotypes when covering male and female candidates, and if this reliance creates differences in coverage, then media treatment can have important consequences for voter information and candidate preference."¹⁰⁵ By media outlets such as *The New York Times* and *Newsday* giving unbiased portrayals of Gillibrand's qualifications for her Senate seat, it undoubtedly

¹⁰⁴ Javier C. Hernandez, Danny Hakim and Nicholas Confessore, "Paterson Announces Choice of Gillibrand for Senate Seat," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/24/nyregion/24choice.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Kim Fridkin Kahn and Edie N. Goldenberg, "Women Candidates in the News: An Examination of Gender Differences in U.S. Senate Campaign Coverage."

provides voters with the necessary information to come to their own conclusions about the candidate, who had to run in the 2010 special election and gain the support of her constituents. As Fridkin Kahn and Goldberg and others insinuate in their research on this topic, this type of coverage is imperative to women candidates being considered in the same light as their male counterparts.

What is evident from the examples of Senators Gillibrand and Ernst is that Kahn's and Goldenberg's theory that women candidates for Senate receive increased sexual stereotyping still holds partially true. It is also safe to assume that as media bias continues to be a barrier for female candidates, Senators Gillibrand and Ernst have likely learned how to handle and manipulate the stereotyping to work to their benefit. Also, as female Senators become a more common entity within the United States Congress, one can assume that the media will become more comfortable and less biased in their portrayal, like in the cases of Gillibrand and Ernst. While this is beginning to happen, it is certainly not always the case.

Conclusion

Through the research conducted on the topic of women candidates and media's portrayal of these candidates, we see that a great deal of media bias still persists, even in a time when many in the United States believe we live in a post-sexist time in which women have equal access to the same rights and opportunities that their male counterparts do. By looking at the media coverage of Hillary Clinton from the time she announced her candidacy for Presidency to the time she conceded, of Sarah Palin from the time John McCain announced her as his running mate to the time that McCain and Palin lost to Barack Obama, and of many Congresswomen and Senators who got elected to their seats despite women holding far fewer seats in the United States Congress than their male counterparts, we see a great deal of media coverage is still focused on women candidates as women, as opposed to politicians. However, there are pockets of this research that shine a glimpse on a less biased, more focused coverage of candidates, particularly at the House and Senate levels, as opposed to higher leadership.

Admittedly, this research could go much further in that it could look at more candidates or spend more time comparing female candidates to the men they ran against, to name a few areas where the research is lacking. A comparative analysis of the coverage of each candidate during a particular period of time could be done.

Additionally, for this research, each and every piece written about these candidates was not reviewed, as it would take a great deal of time and thorough combing to read and analyze all the individual coverage of these women and is a much more expansive project than was taken on here. Instead, I have taken a sampling from different media sources, including national and local newspapers and magazines, to be sure that all types of

readers and constituencies were addressed, in order to show that the issue of media coverage crosses planes and sources and has the potential to influence anyone who reads any and/or all forms of print media, whether it be a well respected national newspaper like the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, or something less well-respected, but still read by the people of the nation, such as *Vanity Fair*, *People Magazine*, or the *New York Observer*.

What this research aims to do is 1) show that there is still a great deal of biased media coverage of candidates, 2) this type of coverage can negatively affect their elections, if not hinder it all together and 3) media coverage of female candidates varies from candidate to candidate especially based on type of position of power. This third point is not one I truly discovered until I reached the third chapter in my study of female politicians elected to the House and Senate. With the exception of Nancy Pelosi who held a unique position of power never before held by a woman, the women of the United States Congress, both House and Senate, indeed faced less media bias as a whole and less aggressive forms of bias when they did receive it, especially in comparison to that of Clinton and Palin. This could be because women of the United States Congress tend to face less national attention, as they represent a small district or just one state, as opposed to Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Nancy Pelosi who would have had or did have greater jurisdiction through their roles. It could also be that we as a society are coming to see women in Congress as our new normal and therefore, the media and our society as a whole have less bias towards this particular group of women, as we see that they can, in fact, perform at a high level and “have it all.”.

In reviewing the literature on the topic of media representation of female candidates in advance of conducting this research, there was a great deal of research that existed in the early 1990's, as there was an influx of women to powerful political positions during that time. Since then, less research has been conducted on this topic. Part of my reasoning for studying and researching this topic was because in an age where our media is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and truly consumed in so many different forms, I was interested to see how things had changed, if they had. I was not alone in this interest. Researchers Jennifer Lawless of American University and Danny Hayes of George Washington University were also interested in the relationship between media and female candidates in contemporary elections, particularly for Congress. Based on their study of 350 House districts during the 2010 midterm election, they remark,

Much research in the study of U.S. politics has argued that female candidates for elected office are treated differently- and often worse- than male candidates in the press and by the public. Although these patterns do not doom women to electoral failure, they raise formidable series of obstacles that often complicate women's path to elective office, slowing the move toward gender parity in representation. Broad changes to the American political landscape, as well as methodological limitations of previous work, however, suggest the need for an updated assessment... We find that candidate sex does not affect journalists' coverage of, or voters' attitudes toward, the women and men running for office in their districts. Rather, reporters' portrayals and citizens' assessments of candidates stem primarily from partisanship, ideology, and incumbency, not the sex of the candidate.¹⁰⁶

This research supports my findings that coverage of Congressional candidates, particularly members of the House, is fairly unbiased when it comes to the issue of the gender of the candidate.

¹⁰⁶ Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless, "A Non-Gendered Lens? Media, Voters, and Female Candidates in Contemporary Congressional Elections."

Hayes and Lawless, however, are just a few of the experts who have reached this conclusion thus far and much more updated research in this field will need to be conducted to determine if this is actually the case. Additionally, this work covers only media coverage of candidates for the House of Representatives, but not coverage of Senate, or Executive office. As my research shows, more bias appears to persist in these areas, particularly the Executive Branch, and very little research disagrees.

In fact, a group of people calling themselves the Clinton “Super Volunteers” has just announced that they plan to track the media’s use of words they believe to be sexist. Throughout a series of tweets, they’ve determined that words such as “polarizing,” “calculating,” “disingenuous,” and “entitled,” just to name a few, are words that, “wouldn’t be attached to male candidates.”¹⁰⁷ They believe there is a double standard for such traits that does not accurately portray female candidates, potentially Hillary Clinton in a bid in the 2016 presidential elections. While this is just a group of Clinton supporters making some noise, their sentiment is the exact intent of this research. The simple use of language can be biased towards one sex or the other without it even being blatant; and this is a problem in American politics that most specifically affects women, more so as they rise to the uppermost leadership positions. It is not only unfair, but it is blatantly prejudicial, and can and often does affect female candidates’ abilities to rise to the top, breaking the final glass ceilings that exist in the United States political system.

¹⁰⁷ Aaron Blake, “The 13 Words You Can’t Write About Hillary Clinton Anymore,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/03/26/the-13-words-you-cant-write-about-hillary-clinton-anymore/?t=sm_fb.

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